

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE  
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spent a month or so driving around looking for one to buy, asking people what went into running a successful restaurant. We also toyed with the idea of an auto repair shop where people wouldn't be ripped off.

One day John Maher, charismatic co-founder of Delancey Street, an entrepreneurial halfway house for addicts, said to me, "Never go into a business you don't understand." That was about the best business advice I have ever received, but it not only ruled out the restaurant and car repair ideas, it seemed to narrow our options to zero. What did I know about *any* business?

As it turned out, plenty. I just had to see what was staring me in the face.

In 1978, while filming *The China Syndrome*, I again fractured my foot, so ballet became impossible for me, at least for the foreseeable future. For more than twenty years ballet, with its strict classical structure and music, had been my haven, my way of staying in shape and keeping at least a tenuous connection to my body. What to do? I had to get into a shape for my next movie, *California Suite*, in which I had to appear in a bikini. Understanding my urgency, my stepmother Shirlee suggested that when the foot was sufficiently healed (where was that Vietnamese chrysanthemum poultice when I really needed it?), I should check out a class at the Gilda Marx studio in Century City, California. The instructor was marvelous, Shirlee said. Her name was Leni Cazden.

Leni was in her early thirties, about five feet five, with short copper-colored hair, green eyes, narrow hips, and an enigmatic combination of aloofness and availability. Her class was a revelation. I entered so-called adult life at a time when challenging physical exercise was not offered to women. We weren't supposed to sweat or have muscles. Now, along with forty other women, I found myself moving nonstop for an hour and a half in entirely new ways.

Leni's class wasn't what would soon become known as aerobics. For something to be aerobic it needs to get your large muscle groups—your thigh, hip, or upper body muscles—working steadily so as to increase your heart rate for at least twenty minutes. This is the form of exercise that burns fat calories and strengthens the heart. But Leni, I would discover later, was a smoker and aerobic activity wasn't for her. Instead her routine was more about strengthening and toning through the use of an

*There are no gains without pains.*

—BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

*Great ideas originate in the muscles.*

—THOMAS EDISON

IT WAS EXPENSIVE running a statewide nonprofit organization like CED in a state as big and diverse as California, and the weakness in the economy was making it increasingly difficult to raise the necessary funds. I was making one or more movies a year by now—*Julia*, *Coming Home*, *Fun with Dick and Jane*, *The China Syndrome*, *Comes a Horseman*, *California Suite*—most quite successful, and every premiere would be a benefit for CED. Still, we worried about being able to sustain the work.

Then I read an article about Lyndon LaRouche, founder of the National Caucus of Labor Committees. (You may remember back in the late seventies seeing people standing in major airports with signs saying things like "Jane Fonda Leaks More Than Nuclear Power Plants" or "Feed Fonda to the Whales." Those people had ties to LaRouche, as did some of the goons who went into bars to beat with chains people they suspected of being gay.) This article said that LaRouche's organization was financed, at least in part, by his computer business. That set Tom and me thinking: Why not start a business that would fund CED? For a while we considered going into the restaurant business, and we actually

interesting combination of repetitive movements that included, to my great pleasure, a surprising amount of ballet, which Leni had learned during her early days as a competitive ice-skater.

Another thing that made the class special was Leni's choice of music. This was the beginning of the disco craze, and most other types of classes relied on this high-volume, repetitive beat to drive the class forward. Not Leni. The music she brought in was Al Green, Kenny Loggins, Fleetwood Mac, Teddy Pendergass, Stevie Wonder, and Marvin Gaye.

Up until then I had known next to nothing about current popular music. If I listened to the radio, it was to NPR for the news. Now these new sounds entered my life. I began to move to a different rhythm, becoming one of those people you see through their car windows singing and grooving to music only they can hear. I never did go back to ballet.

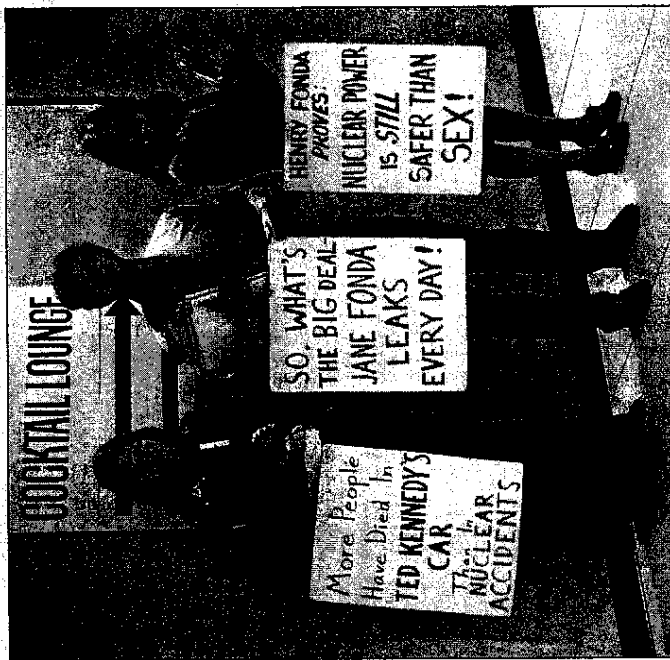
I had ceased bingeing and purging the year before (more about that later) but was still a recovering food addict and way too compulsive when it came to exercise. I hated to miss even a day, and when there were no scheduled classes, I would hire Leni to teach me privately.

One day an idea hit me: Leni and I could go into the exercise business together! It was perfect. Here was *one* thing that I *understood* in my gut: how exercise could affect a woman's body and mind. I knew it myself from ballet and now was learning another way from Leni. Helping women get fit was a business I could understand and respect. If it was successful, it could help finance CED!

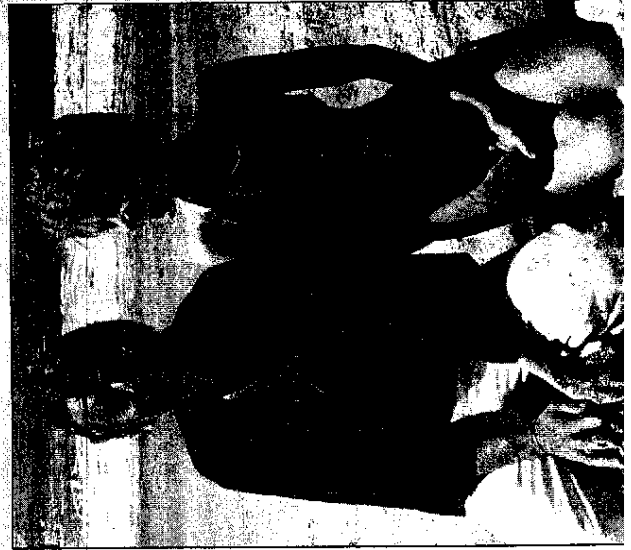
Leni liked the idea. We searched for names for the business and decided on Jane and Leni's Workout.

During this time, I began to teach the routine myself in St. George, Utah, where I was on location with *The Electric Horseman*, my third film with Bob Redford. At night after work women of all ages and a few men from the film crew came from miles around to take the class, which I held in the basement of a small spa. The experience of teaching such a diverse group opened my eyes to a much broader array of the benefits of exercise than I had ever expected. One woman said she'd stopped needing sleeping pills. People told me they felt less stressed. Most profound, though, were the testimonials that showed how women were starting to feel differently about themselves—empowered. Clearly we were on to something that mattered more than just how a person looked, and no one was really talking about that beyond the vanity stuff.

Leni and I began to interview teachers to hire for a studio. We found



*Lyndon LaRouche fielded these folks in major airports around the country back in the late seventies. It was hard to walk by with Vanessa and Troy and maintain my composure.*  
(Anne Marie Staats)



*On Malibu beach between scenes in California Suite with director Herbert Ross.*  
(Photofest)

a space in Beverly Hills, on Robertson Boulevard, and I hired an architect to begin renovation plans. I wanted to offer ballet, jazz, and stretch classes and felt we needed some easier and shorter classes in addition to Leni's marathon routine. Then the time came to set up the actual business structure and draw up contracts. What happened then is painful to write about.

My primary goal in going into this business was to raise money for CED. My lawyer at the time persuaded me that the best way to do the contract from a tax perspective was to have CED own the business. What would Leni's role be, then? Leni was no more a businesswoman than I was, and it was clear that neither of us could actually *run* the Workout. I would have to hire someone to do that job. Yet if we were going into the business together, she couldn't be just one of the teachers; it was *her* routine that would be the foundation for the business. But if she was a partner in the usual sense, how could we square that with CED owning the business? No one, least of all me, ever imagined that the Workout could become as successful as it did. So round and round we went, me with the lawyer. What to do about Leni?

Looking back, I see so clearly that the answer to "What to do about Leni?" was to *talk to her*, find out what she wanted and what it would take to make us both feel that our needs were addressed. Instead I let the lawyer frame the debate, putting Leni into the position of adversary who (we were sure) would fight against CED owning the business. (I was to take no money at all for myself out of the business.) Then one day Leni told me that she had met and was going to marry a wealthy man, and they were planning a round-the-world trip for two years on a sailboat they had built. But I doubt that she would have done this had she felt able to sit down with me and work out a fair deal for herself.

The Workout went on to become a worldwide phenomenon, beyond anything any of us had ever imagined. For those of you who came to one of the Workout studios and did the advanced Workout class, that was a somewhat easier version of Leni's original routine. The one-and-a-half-hour video called *Workout Challenge* was a replica of the class I took with Leni. It is important that I tell this story—and that Leni finally get the credit due her for her original routine.

Many years elapsed. Leni found herself training my then-husband, Ted Turner, at a gym in West Los Angeles. That's how she and I reconnected and became friends. And that's when I learned that because of a

growing-up as traumatic as any I have ever heard about, Leni had been robbed of the ability to speak up on her own behalf. The word *no* was not part of her vocabulary, and she had felt powerless earlier to negotiate with me and the lawyer. Had we been able to sit face-to-face as women—Leni owning her voice and me not ceding mine to the lawyer—things could have been worked out. At least I've tried over the intervening years to make it up to Leni.

We weren't at all prepared for the huge success. The Workout was very small, with only three studios and bathroom facilities suited to the modest mom-and-pop-type business I had envisioned. But from the minute we opened our doors in 1979 it was like an avalanche, without our once having to pay for advertising. Talk show hosts Merv Griffin and Barbara Walters *asked* to come and film classes. People flocked from all over the country. It became a "must visit" site for tourists from other *countries*.

I hired a woman activist from CED, the only person I knew with an MBA, to run the studio. We learned as we went, and it was never easy. We often had upward of two thousand clients a day—seventy thousand a year—working out in three small classrooms. In summer the air-conditioning wasn't up to the task, the bathrooms weren't large enough, clients would get into fights if someone took their accustomed place in front of the mirror, and teachers bridled at having to start and end on time and follow a set routine. Yet the clients kept coming, filling just about every class. There were beginning, middle, and advanced Workout classes, and stretch classes.

My friend and birthing coach Femmy DeLyser became director of the Pregnancy, Birth, and Recovery Workout classes, which were immensely popular. I'd regretted having to give up all exercise both times I'd been pregnant and felt committed to providing a safe, effective way for women to stay fit while waiting for their deliveries. It was Femmy's inspired idea to also have classes for the moms *recovering* from childbirth. The babies would come with them and were often incorporated into the exercises—lying on their mothers' bellies during abdominal work, for instance—and the classes would end with lessons in baby massage. These classes proved wonderful on many levels, not least of which was their social value: The women enjoyed comparing notes about their birthing experiences while they nursed and discussing how others were dealing



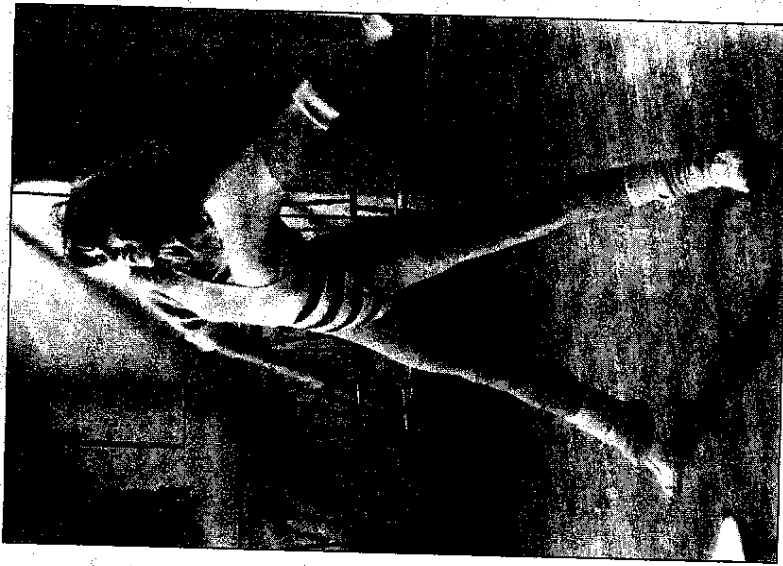
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with new-mother issues. Later Femmy and I did a pregnancy, birth, and recovery book and video, using pregnant women from the class, including actress Jane Seymour. Women who had just given birth demonstrated recovery exercises and baby massage. It was the first of its kind.

Two years later (1981), I wrote my first *Jane Fonda's Workout Book*. It was number one on *The New York Times* Bestseller List for a record twenty-four months (that was before they put such books in their separate How-To books section) and was translated into over fifty languages. It was while writing the book that I realized I needed to study physiology to more deeply understand what was happening during exercise. For instance, I had learned from personal experience that an exercise was more effective if I worked hard enough to cause a burning sensation in the muscle, but I didn't know why. I knew what aerobic meant—sort of—but not really. So I began to research sports physiology and talk to doctors, like Dr. James Garrick at Saint Francis Memorial Hospital in San Francisco, with whom I did a sports medicine video. I did the same with nutrition—discovering, for instance, why complex carbohydrates give more lasting energy than simple carbs, why having a healthy breakfast and a light dinner was advisable, and why some fat is healthier than others. My bedtime reading changed from books like *The Wealth of Nations* to *Gray's Anatomy*. I studied the process of aging and menopause and co-wrote a book with another CED activist, Mignon McCarthy, called *Women Coming of Age*, which also became a best-seller.

Less than a year into the business, a man named Stuart Karl came into my life. Stuart was the father of how-to home videos, having made the very first of the home improvement types. His wife, Debbie, read the Workout book and told her husband he should get me to do it as a video. When I got the call I remember thinking, Home video? What's that? Like most people back then, I didn't own a VCR. I'm an actor, I thought. It would look foolish for me to be exercising on camera. I gave Karl a firm no. But he kept coming back until finally I relented, thinking, *It won't take long and it will bring some additional income into CED*. I certainly never saw it as a big moneymaker. No one I knew had ever bought a videotape.

I remember writing out the shooting script for the first Workout video in pencil on the floor. Despite protestations from Sid Galanty, a friend who became the producer and director of the first wave of my videos, I decided that to reduce the cost of the production we wouldn't



*The Workout.*  
(Kelvin Jones)



*I traveled the country raising money for Tom's campaigns by teaching huge workout classes like these.*



use hair or makeup people or teleprompters. I'd just wing it. I never imagined how hard it would be. First of all, because everything on the video would be reversed for the viewer, every time I wanted them to move right I'd have to say left, and all this while executing the moves correctly and trying not to seem breathless—on a concrete studio floor never designed for aerobics.

As it turned out, it didn't really matter *how* we did the video. We had no competition (*that* would soon change), and we could have all been painted purple and covered with sequins. All that mattered was that people could follow what we were doing. The crucial thing about creating a successful business, I have subsequently realized, is timing—giving people something they really want that they can't yet get anywhere else. But at the time I was not aware of how serendipitous our timing was, or that there was a budding video industry poised to explode.

That first video, the original *Jane Fonda's Workout* (1982), remains to this day the biggest-selling home video of all time (seventeen million copies). In addition, it helped create the home video industry. Up until then people weren't buying videos, because they didn't own the necessary hardware—a VCR player, which was expensive—and there weren't any videos that people felt they had to have for repeat use that would justify the cost of the hardware. But once the Workout videos arrived, people were suddenly buying VCRs like crazy. This is why I am the first person in the "Talent" category to have been inducted into the Video Hall of Fame, an honor usually reserved for inventors and marketers of hardware. I am extremely proud of this and appear to be boasting (well, maybe *I am* boasting), but remember, all this success happened in spite of me. *Who knew?* Well, Debbie Karl knew. And her husband, Stuart, was smart enough to listen to his smart wife.

Letters began coming in by the basketful from women who were "doing Jane," as they called it, all over the world. They were touching, handwritten letters I have kept to this day, usually starting with how they had never written to a celebrity before and were sure I wouldn't actually read their letter myself. Some were about my Workout book, some about the videotapes or the audiotape version. These women poured their hearts out, about weight they had lost, self-esteem they had gained, how they were finally able to stand up to their boss or recover from a mastectomy, asthma, respiratory failure, diabetes. One woman described how, brushing her teeth one morning, she was stunned to see

arm muscles in the mirror for the first time. A Peace Corps volunteer wrote me about how she "did Jane" using the audiotape every day in her mud hut in Guatemala. Another told how a group of nine women in Lesotho in southern Africa would get together three times a week to "do Jane" and had discovered that the social aspect of these sessions was as rewarding as the exercising. Here's a quote from a thirty-eight-year-old woman who had lost eighty pounds using my book and video:

*I couldn't begin to put in a letter how my life has changed. It's incredible. I'm a person I've never been before. I've started a cleaning business, set my own hours, asked for a raise, and got it. This may not sound like much to someone as strong as you, but I used to be so ashamed of myself I never even wanted to go outside. Now I like myself, I'm strong, I'm confident, I feel so wonderful I can't describe it!*

Something new was starting to happen to me as well: When your voice and image are coming into someone's living room (or mud hut) every day, via video or on a record, you become part of people's lives in a personal way, different from movie stars on the big screen, and this was affecting how people reacted to me. *They felt they knew me.* Often I would come into a store to buy something, and when someone heard my voice, even if their backs were turned, they knew who I was—and would want to tell me stories about which tape they used, whom they "did Jane" with, how it had affected them. Once a woman got down on the floor of a drugstore to ask if she was doing her pelvic tilts correctly. Husbands would say, "I wake up to your voice every morning 'cause my wife does you in the living room."

I didn't know whether to say thank you or to apologize.

I'd been used to celebrity, but this was a new world, and I began to think, Hey, wait a minute. What about me as an actor? What about the causes I am fighting for? What's with the pelvic tilts already? The Workout phenomenon, it seemed, had superseded everything else about me, and while I loved knowing I was making a positive difference in women's lives, it made me uneasy. I didn't want pelvic tilts to define me. Still, I was becoming fascinated with the business itself—and not only the money it was bringing in.

I found that making the business a success was a creative process. I wanted to see it make a difference—not just for wealthy women in Beverly Hills but, through the videos, for senior citizens, kids, and employed

women who had little disposable income and even less time. I did focus groups to better understand what women wanted. I would be riveted listening to the thoughts of these secretaries, small-business owners, wives, students, women in real estate—Middle-American women—as they expressed their wants and needs in the area of exercise. They spoke of their difficulty finding time to go to a gym and affording baby-sitters, and they all expressed gratitude to the Workout for creating our home videos.

I sometimes taught classes myself, especially at the beginning, so that I could learn what worked. During filming on 9 to 5 in Los Angeles, I taught a 5:00 A.M. class three times a week before going to work. Dolly Parton thought I was mad as a hatter coming in all sweaty and red as I did.

I soon opened a second studio in Encino, a small city in the San Fernando Valley, and then a third in San Francisco. Business consultants were advising me to franchise the Workout, and that was when I knew I had to engage an executive search firm to help me find an experienced businesswoman to run it.

I interviewed fifteen women. I never considered hiring a man, because so much of my business was made up of women and because I felt I would be more comfortable with a woman partner. I chose the woman I did for three reasons: First, she was from the Midwest; because of Dad, I see midwesterners as hardworking, frugal, and honest. Second, she told me she cried when she heard "The Star-Spangled Banner." Third, she had married her high school sweetheart. The last two told me she was bedrock and loyal. I was not mistaken. (Actually there was a fourth reason: Her name was Julie Lafond and Lafonda made a great name for our partnership.)

The first vital piece of advice Julie gave me was to close down the two newest studios and not franchise. "You don't want to be in bricks and mortar," she said. "It's the tapes and books that will be your main source of money (and fewer headaches), and the Beverly Hills Workout will be the laboratory where you try out new classes and keep your finger on the pulse of the people we serve—what works for them and what doesn't."

Two years after Julie arrived, I decided to separate the Workout from CED. I wanted to grow the business but could not because all the income was being paid out in dividends to the organization. By that time (the mid-1980s), the Workout had brought \$17 million into CED, and I felt we had more than fulfilled our original mission of providing it with a



*Julie Lafond, director of the Jane Fonda Workout, is on the right.  
Jeanne Ernst, a lead instructor, is between us.*

*(Lynn Houston Photography)*



solid financial base. As long as I owned the Workout business, I could grow it while continuing to donate money to CED as needed.

By now Tom had been elected to the California State Assembly and others were running CED day to day. But from the get-go Tom had hated the Workout, seeing it as an exercise in vanity. He told me once that he felt the problems in our marriage began with the Workout. Maybe. My time was certainly taken up more and more with the business, but whenever he made disparaging remarks about it, I would just think, Okay, I'm vain, call it what you will, but it sure makes a lot of women feel better. Besides, where else would you have gotten \$17 million?

In the end Julie and I produced five books, twelve audio programs, and twenty-three videotapes—everything from the basic Workout to yoga and step aerobics; some short, easy ones for older people; and two for kids called *Funhouse Fitness*. By now competition had become fierce, which forced us to spend more money on our productions and marketing. But we got it down to a science and could shoot a video in five days (though we would spend from six months to a year developing each one). I was adamant that there be a variety of people performing on the videos with me, so that home viewers would feel represented: We had racial diversity and men as well as women, some young, some older, some slim, and some not so slim.

I had fun coming up with innovative ideas. For instance, instead of the traditional disco workout beat, we used Scottish jigs, Latin, country, and bluegrass, and we would choreograph accordingly. I would usually do the choreography myself. That way I could be sure it was something that I—a good decade or more older than the other dancers—was able to do. In one video I came up with the idea of having teacher Jeanne Ernst and myself perform part of the routine in front of a screen, on which a film appropriate to the music was projected. I used these tapes myself and knew how important it was to keep them interesting. On another tape I had thought it would be funny to have a guy seem to crash the class, just sort of come in late and insert himself into the back row and then act very crazy. To this day people refer to “that tape with the crazy guy.” In one of the aerobics videos we did, *Lean Routine Workout*, I wanted an urban feel, so our set was the roof of a city tenement building at night.

Right after making that video, I met Ted Turner, and I never had time after that to do a full ensemble aerobics video (which took months

of creating, weeks of rehearsing, and a week of shooting). But the business did continue under Julie Lafond's guidance for a number of years, during which I put out Workout videos with me alone (much easier to do). Together Julie and I also created a second Workout book and a cookbook, *Cooking for Healthy Living*. Julie helped me develop a self-generating treadmill we sold that didn't need to be plugged in (appealing to my desire for energy efficiency), plus a host of other Workout paraphernalia that was also very lucrative.

Julie and some of the Workout teachers became close friends—Jeanne Ernst and Laurel Sparks in particular. We would go on marathon bike rides and hikes together. Troy and Vanessa came with us on one wild and woolly three-day bike trip through Napa Valley. That was when I saw how naturally strong and fit both my children are . . . without even trying!

I came to depend a lot on my friendships with many of the teachers at the Workout. In retrospect I see they were like a safety valve, allowing a suppressed part of me to surface. I remember a journalist friend of mine coming to the set one day while we were taping the *Lean Routine* video. He hung around for a while and later said to me, “I can't believe how different you were around those women. I've never seen this laughing, joking side of you before.”

It isn't easy for me to accept the fact that many young people, if they know me at all, know me as “the woman in the exercise video their mother used.” Yet I am proud that the Workout got so many women feeling better about themselves and their bodies.\*

Working out can mean different things depending on where a person is at a given time in her life. Working out can be narrowly about armoring ourselves in muscle or about striving for toxic, elusive perfection. But it can also, for a more conscious person, be about breathing energy and life into the core of the body, building chi, communicating on a deep level with your cells. For me it started off in the former categories and

\*I am releasing several new exercise DVDs featuring my most popular workouts. Two to three complete workout programs will be combined on one DVD. The Personal Trainer series—three complete programs in one DVD—focuses on distinct body parts. *The Complete Workout and Stress Reduction* DVD combines my Complete Workout program with a unique low-impact stress-reduction program. In recognition of the growing childhood obesity trend in the United States, I'm re-releasing my two successful Funhouse Fitness kids exercise programs on one DVD, called *Jane Fonda Presents: Funhouse Fitness for Kids*.

later developed into the latter as I began moving more frequently out of the gym and into nature, climbing mountains, biking, doing meditation and yoga. That's when I began adding working *in* to my working *out*.

I know now that, for me, the moving to the music, the endorphins, the sweating, led me into the long, slow process of accepting my own body. (It would also help me remain intact during the dark times that lay ahead.)

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

# GHOST

*A body without a spirit is a corpse,  
and a spirit without a body is a ghost.*

—ABRAHAM JOSHUA HESCHEL

WHEN I MET TOM, my attention had been focused almost entirely away from my film career, and there was no reason to assume I would ever be a major star again. While I had been active in the antiwar movement for two years before meeting him, Tom's unique, decade-long experience as an organizer made it natural for me to follow his lead. This created a power balance between us that offset the inordinate celebrity that accrues to movie stars. So when *Fun with Dick and Jane* came out, followed closely by *Julia*, then *Coming Home* and a second Oscar, it created tensions.

Soon after *Coming Home* opened with all the attendant fanfare, magazine covers, and press junkets, Tom asked Bruce and Paula to come up to Laurel Springs, where the four of us were to have what we thought was a criticism/self-criticism encounter---where we would discuss our shortcomings, hear one another out, clear the air. Neither Paula, Bruce, nor I was entirely sure what the air needed to be cleared of, but these sorts of meetings were not unusual among movement people back then, so we all assumed it would be constructive.

Soon after the meeting began, Tom turned on me, accusing me of hogging the limelight and not giving Bruce the attention and credit he was due for *Coming Home*. But it soon became clear to all three of us that Bruce was only an excuse for Tom to express his own barely suppressed rage over what he viewed as the injustice of a movie star receiving so



much attention when the "real" people—who risk their lives every day and work hard to change the balance of power in the world—never get public credit. They, Tom said, are the unsung heroes, and it's not fair. Which is largely true, I suppose. On the one hand, films can put out powerful images and messages that have a deep impact on people; on the other hand, they are only images, not actions in themselves. There's something fundamentally superficial surrounding the profession—not the art of it but the celebrity, the self-promotion, the rarefied atmosphere. I'd had it all my life, first through my father, then on my own, so I hardly noticed it. But to Tom it was deeply disturbing.

Ultimately the discussion played right to my Achilles' heel, making me feel that what I did wasn't worth a damn, that I and it were superficial and peripheral to what was really important. Paula and Bruce still have vivid memories of the experience, and as Bruce said later, "The level of his anger at you surprised me. It was personalized, intense, and designed to hurt." But instead of dealing with things personally and saying, "What's happening with the renewal of your career is hard for me to handle" or "I am not happy in this marriage," Tom couched everything in political terms: "Is this behavior correct or incorrect?" I recently came upon an interview done with the two of us in 1973, the year of our marriage, which is another illustration of this: Writer Leroy Aarons asked what had brought us together, and Tom's answer was, "The degree to which Jane had changed and the mutual strategic outlook was exactly right." Gone were the days, it seemed, when a man would say, "Because I fell in love with her," or, "Because I love her and her commitment to things I also believe in."

When I read the article at the time it came out, the coldness of Tom's reply didn't register, possibly because I too had learned to set aside or hide personal emotions in favor of a more "politically correct" stance. We were becoming mirror images of each other.

When I fell in love with Tom, I thought he was someone whose sense of himself was so secure that my celebrity would pose no threat; someone who could be gentle, with whom I could begin to unwind and open up. I was wrong. I don't think it was purposeful on his part, but Tom's emotional coldness reflected my father's, and Tom also played on my insecurities, making me feel stupid and superficial when I was with him.

In spite of my theoretical identification with feminism, I was passive with Tom, still assuming that whatever was wrong was *my* fault. If he

didn't like one of my women friends (and generally he didn't), I assumed he saw flaws I couldn't see. I rarely disagreed with him about where the family should go for vacations, what we should do, or (as you now know) where and how we should live. I simply didn't think that my ideas or feelings were as credible or important as his. Anger had started to roil up in my body during lovemaking, blotting out intimacy. It's hard to enjoy lovemaking when you're mad. It confused and scared me, because I didn't know I was angry, or why. Such is the power of denial when you need to keep a marriage, a family, together. I read somewhere, probably *Cosmopolitan*, that women are supposed to ask for what they want. Ask! I'd rather die.

*What if he won't or can't give me what I want? Then he'll feel bad and I'll feel worse, and I don't want to make him feel bad because then he won't like me even more, and what if he is opposed on some moral or political grounds to giving me what I want? Then I'll just be left with my anger. It's easier on everyone if I just don't say what I want. No one will notice, and anyway I've learned to do without. Does everyone else ask? Am I the only one whose communication lines have been permanently severed?*

So I postponed the pain I feared would come if I truly communicated, figuring it would go away. Years went by and I'd think, *Well, that's in the past, why raise it now?* But pain and anger stay there and accumulate; together they fester and create distance. Someone once said that under the bell jar of compliance, the only thing that blooms is rage.

I wanted the marriage to work and so chose not to see what I later learned was evident to all our friends: that Tom constantly put me down. In her autobiography, the late Katharine Graham writes how after her husband, Phil Graham, had left her, women friends told her how shocked they had been at the nasty way he often treated her. This took her by surprise. "I always viewed it as a joke," she wrote, "and thus didn't see the comments and behavior as put-downs." It was oddly comforting to learn that even a woman as bright and successful as Kay Graham—publisher of *The Washington Post*—could choose not to see what her friends saw. Eleanor Roosevelt, another strong woman with her own experiences in such things, once said, "No one can make you feel inferior without your permission." That's right. By choosing denial, I had permitted inferiority. It would take another passage through another marriage, to Ted Turner, for me to fully emerge, popping up like a periscope to look around and say, "Hey, wait a minute! This is who I am! I need you to deal with it."

I don't know when it started, the change from the cozy comradeship Tom and I had shared early in our relationship to something that resembled a business arrangement—except one in which I was still expected to remain sexual and desirous, although I didn't want to be. Widening the chasm was Tom's addiction to alcohol. Because neither of us would fess up and deal with it, our disconnectedness grew. But at the time I was still so into my own addiction to food that I didn't even see his. Or maybe it was one more thing I didn't want to see. *He's Irish after all . . . it's a cultural thing, right?*

In the swirl of interesting activity that was our life, it wasn't hard for me to sweep things under the rug with the false certainty that just around the corner everything would change. A part of me thought that perhaps this was what marriage was meant to be like. I'd had no training in intimacy—but I'm getting ahead of myself.

I knew that a big part of the problem was the eating disorder that had been with me since age fifteen, hovering darkly over my life, and especially over my relationships—a secret that no one knew. I haven't continually brought it into this narrative, but it was always there, as you know. Anyone reading this who has an addiction knows that you carry the secret demon within you and it colors everything you do, at certain times more than others. That's the thing about addictions: They occasionally take phony leaves of absence, which trick you into believing you have it all under control, only to return and whack you across the back of your knees. And down you go. No one sees this, of course. It's the soft *inner* you that's been brought down, not the perfect, efficient, in-charge, outer container that seems to manage life so well.

By the time I hit my forties, though, I was living on sheer willpower. The effort it took to keep the outer me together left the inner me exhausted for longer and longer stretches of time. Sometimes it took a whole week to recover from a binge and purge. Author/poet Robin Morgan once told me about a translucent third eyelid, called the nictitating membrane, beneath the lower lids of the eyes of some animals like cats and owls. The eyelid isn't closed, but it isn't open either; it's just gray. That was me in the periods following a binge and purge. A nictitating membrane would settle over my being. My husband and children were so accustomed to this veil that they thought it *was* me, and they would have been shocked if it had suddenly disappeared. It's impossible to connect in a real way with your intimates when you are living with an addiction.

I realized I had to make a choice between life and a living death. I had to move toward the light or succumb to the darkness. I had an unusually full, interesting, demanding life that was important to me: my family, my films, my political work. I was going a mile a minute, developing films, winning awards, raising money. People were depending on me. Plus, I wanted to make a difference, and that's hard when you're under a nictitating membrane. It wasn't worth it, blowing my life.

One morning I woke up and knew that I would have to quit—cold turkey. I couldn't keep going. It was like going into a battle that lasted for several years. I gave up the excitement, the fast-beating heart, the momentary pleasure—and the insufferable guilt, depression, and sense of worthlessness that followed. Still, it was not until about five years or more after I quit that I could sit down for a meal and not feel my heart pounding, not wish I could just banish food from the house the way you can banish alcohol or drugs. But I couldn't. I had a family to feed.

I was like a dry drunk who'd stopped drinking but had left unexplored the reasons for her addiction. The dark, empty place at my core was still there. It never occurred to me to consider working the twelve-step program for addictions. That might have led me to open myself so that a higher power, a holy Spirit, or whatever one wants to call it could enter me and soften the hard, empty place. But I didn't see myself as the spirit type, not then. I was living entirely in my head, certain that if I was smart enough—and as “pure” as I felt Tom to be—we would be together forever.

I still needed a man to validate me. Sometimes that came from the waist down, sometimes it came from the neck up. I believed that Vadim had seen me from the neck down, as a physical object who appealed to him and whom he enjoyed displaying. I didn't want that ever again. I wanted Tom to see me from the neck up, to respect me. I didn't realize how dangerous this body/mind split can be to relationships.

My food addiction had represented a misguided search for perfection and nurture, to fill the emptiness and to “get into” my body. I quit the bingeing and purging but the need remained, a need to connect with my body and break out of the rigid container of false control I had built around myself.

I replaced food with sex. I had an affair.

It was wonderful, and traumatic. I lived with the constant sense that I would be struck down for my transgression, and at the same time I felt

joyously liberated. Being with someone for the sole purpose of pleasure, for whom I was not "wife" (hence under no obligation to be "good"), brought me back to a part of myself that had gone dead. Though my marriage actually improved during this time, after a while I could no longer tolerate the duality of my existence, so I had to put an end to the affair. It was excruciatingly difficult to give up that part of myself. I had been miserable in the lie and I was miserable without it. But I knew I had to end it. Above all I did not want to destroy our family. I never spoke of this to Tom, nor did I know that he himself was seeking solace elsewhere. We simply continued in our unusual, seemingly successful partnership.

I often think of alternative how-it-could-have-gone scenarios about events in my past that didn't go right. In the case of my marriage to Tom, I should have taken his face in my hands, looked into his eyes, and said, "I want us to work this out. If you do, too, then let's each admit our addiction and try to heal, and get help with 'us.' I think the issues go deep and I am frightened to do it alone. I am very angry and I don't know why. We need a referee. Let's look for a caring professional who can help us work this through." Instead I would say, "I think we should see a therapist," and he would say, "No," and I'd fall silent. Like the magician's assistant, with body cut in two, I took up permanent residence in my head and ventured out only when in the company of women friends or while exercising, dancing, or getting massaged.

But there are many truths in any relationship. Tom and I shared many interests, and we continued for eight more years after the affair to have an exciting life. When we were working together on a project or a tour and were hitting on all fours, I could forget what was missing. He brought structure to my life, depth of field to my vision, and a sense of how change can happen. Above all, there's our wondrous son.

I loved Tom's passion for baseball, how he coached Troy's Little League team and never missed a game, not once. I always learned so much from him. It was Tom who brought fascinating thinkers like Desmond Tutu, Alvin Toffler, and Howard Zinn into our home; Tom who initiated incredible family vacations that took us to faraway lands like Israel and South Africa, where we would spend time with the keenest minds in a given country. He opened up whole new vistas of ideas for me, and I am very grateful.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

# SYNCHRONICITY

*Do not leave the theatre satisfied*

*Do not be reconciled. . . .*

*You cannot live on our wax fruit  
Leave the theatre hungry  
For change*

—FROM EDWARD BOND,  
*On Leaving the Theatre*

**I**N MANY WAYS, I was starting to come into my own as I found ways to move the social issues that Tom and I were organizing around into mainstream Hollywood films. I found this synchronicity exciting, almost miraculous.

No sooner had I wrapped *Comes a Horseman* with Jason Robards and James Caan than I began filming *The China Syndrome*. It was exciting to once again be working on a project that I felt passionately about with people who shared the passion. *The China Syndrome* dovetailed perfectly with what the Campaign for Economic Democracy was all about: blowing the whistle on large corporations that were willing to risk the public's welfare to protect their profits.

As Jim Bridges had developed it, *The China Syndrome* told of a Los Angeles TV reporter who is filming with her crew at a nuclear power plant near Los Angeles when something causes panic in the control room. Unbeknownst to her, her cameraman (played by Michael Douglas) films what is going on, but the TV station refuses to air the footage. The cameraman steals the film and shows it to a physicist, who says,



"You're lucky to be alive—and so is the rest of Southern California." The expert explains that what we have captured on film was a near core meltdown: when a reactor loses its cooling water and the heat of the radioactive fuel becomes intense enough to melt the reactor core—and the steel and concrete of the containment building beneath it, sinking through the earth all the way to China (hence the term *China syndrome*). When the fuel meltdown hits groundwater, clouds of radioactive steam are sent into the atmosphere, potentially killing many thousands of people and contaminating many square miles of land. The plant's supervisor (Jack Lemmon) refuses to be mollified by the power company's assurances that nothing important went wrong. He begins his own investigation and discovers structural hazards at the core of the plant's reactor. He is in the process of seizing control of the reactor when a SWAT team enters the control room and guns him down.

*The China Syndrome* had been playing in theaters for about two weeks, with great box office success. Conservative columnist George Will had called us irresponsible for making a thriller that would scare people about nuclear power because, he said, it was based on fantasy, not fact. Then, on March 30, 1979, while I was in St. George, Utah, filming *The Electric Horseman*, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission announced that high levels of radiation were leaking from inside the reactor of the Three Mile Island atomic power plant near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Radioactive steam clouds were escaping. The commission admitted there was "the ultimate risk of a meltdown," and Pennsylvania's governor, Dick Thornburgh, asked that children and pregnant women within a five-mile radius of the Three Mile Island facility evacuate the area.

It was beyond belief, the most shocking synchronicity between real-life catastrophe and movie fiction ever to have occurred. The film had been doing brisk business, but once Three Mile Island happened it became a blockbuster—not just in the United States but all over the world. People went to see it to understand what had happened in Pennsylvania.

Immediately after finishing *The Electric Horseman*, Tom and I went on our third national tour, the first since the end of the Vietnam War, this time focusing on economic democracy, the perils of nuclear energy, and the benefits of energy alternatives like solar and wind. We received a lot of media coverage, mostly due to Three Mile Island.



With Jack Lemmon in *The China Syndrome*.



Vanessa Williams visiting me on the set of *The China Syndrome*.

Along the way it was women who really stood out for me—women like Lois Gibbs at Love Canal, who organized other women to fight against the toxic wastes buried beneath the community and causing serious, even fatal, health problems. There were others like her, housewives who had looked over their shoulders to see who would come to the rescue, only to find it would have to be themselves—and discovering *they* were true leaders.

Karen Nussbaum, my friend from the antiwar days, had gotten me interested in office workers. Karen told me about sexual harassment, about women being on the job fifteen years and seeing men they trained get promoted right past them and made their supervisors, and about clerical workers at some of the wealthiest banks who were paid so little they were eligible for food stamps. This was what got me thinking about making a movie on the subject. During the tour we did events in eight cities to promote 9to5, the national clerical workers organization that Karen started, and when I talked about the idea of a film to the thousands of office workers who attended these events, their excitement was palpable.

We did not see it as a comedy at first. What's funny about working fifteen-hour days and getting paid for forty hours' work a week?

Back in Los Angeles I went to see Lily Tomlin in Jane Wagner's one-woman play, *Appearing Nitely* (later titled *The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe*), and fell head over heels for this woman and her unique, spectacular talent. Driving home from the theater that night, I turned on the radio and Dolly Parton was singing "Two Doors Down." Bingo! Lily, Dolly, and Jane!

Bruce and I knew that to get Lily and Dolly to agree to be in the film meant my taking the least interesting role, whichever one that turned out to be. Paula Weinstein, my friend and former agent, was now a production executive at Twentieth Century-Fox, and she steered us to writer/director Colin Higgins.

Bruce and I brought Colin to Ohio, to the offices of Cleveland Women Working,\* which was being run by my former housemate Carol Kurtz. She had assembled a diverse group of about forty women who took turns telling their office stories while Colin took notes. Just as veterans in the VA

\*It was also the central office of 9to5, the National Association of Working Women, which grew out of Nussbaum's Working Women Organizing Project in Boston.



During the IPC tour, walking the gauntlet at the L.A. airport with Vanessa.  
(Michael Dobo/www.dobophoto.com)



had told us of experiences that ended up in *Coming Home*, so it was with the secretaries. When every woman in the circle had had her say, Colin asked a question that took me by surprise: "Have any of you ever fantasized about what you'd like to do to your boss?" The women looked at one another and burst out laughing. *Fantasize? You want to know what we fantasize? Shazaaaam!* We had the central idea for our movie—secretaries' fantasies about doing away with their bosses.

Within weeks of our return, Colin wrote the script and Dolly and Lily agreed to be in the picture. We filmed in the winter of 1980, and the entire experience was a joy from start to finish.

Dolly thought that when shooting began she had to have memorized the entire script and astounded us by doing just that. With great comedians the work seems just to flow spontaneously, but I learned from watching Lily that it's not like that. I once had to co-introduce someone with Steve Martin at a fund-raising function, and he reworked and rehearsed "Hello, this is . . ." for at least ten minutes before we went onstage, turning it around in his mouth, trying out different timings. I was awed. Lily's like that—never sure it's good enough, always wanting to do it one more time with a slightly different twist. Henry Miller once said, "Art teaches nothing except the significance of life." To me, this sums up the work Lily does in partnership with Jane Wagner. Through her quirky and always identifiable characters, she reveals truths that lie just outside our consciousness; she wakes us up.

I had never met anyone like Dolly. She always had a wisecrack, usually high raunch, that would break us all up. My son, Troy, who was around seven, loved coming to the set just to look at her. One day Dolly asked him if he knew why her feet were so small. He turned bright red and shook his head. "Well, Troy, it's because things don't grow big in the shade." He was too young to get it right away, but the rest of us doubled over laughing.

Dolly specializes in laughter. Hers is somewhere between a girl's giggle, an explosive shriek, and a cascade of little bells. It's not her boobs that precede her through a door, it's her laughter. Between that and the clicking of her spike heels, we could always hear her coming.

Karen Nussbaum says she's seen the movie five times or more and always loved to watch the women's reaction to various scenes. "I remember being in the theater one time and in the scene where you are working on the Xerox machine and it goes wild, a woman stood up in the middle

Hugging Bruce  
on the set of 9 to 5.



We laughed a lot  
during that film.  
(© Steve Schapiro)



Dolly invited all the women who worked on 9 to 5 to come to the recording studio and sing the chorus with her for the album. That's Lily to the left of Dolly and way to the right (in the white shirt) is Dot, Vanessa's



of the theater and yelled out, "Push the star button!" The atmosphere in the theaters was always the same: The women went wild, shouted back to the screen, and applauded at the end. Men liked the movie but were quiet; they knew something dangerous might be happening."

Karen, who remains an important figure in the labor movement within the AFL-CIO, says she always considered *9 to 5* the perfect example of popular culture moving a public debate forward, something that can really happen, she says, only "when there is a social basis, a nascent movement which can benefit from and exploit a popular expression. The way I saw it," she explains, "was that before the movie we had to argue that women's work was plagued by discrimination. The movie put an end to that debate . . . the audiences recognized it and laughed at it. Now the debate could shift to what we should do about it." Immediately after the movie was released Karen traveled to twenty cities across the country, building what she called "the movement behind the movie." Very soon *9 to 5* grew to include twenty staffed chapters, and that was when they began to lay the groundwork for their national union, District 925 of the Service Employees International Union.

The movie was a blockbuster.

Dolly wrote "*9 to 5*," the film's theme song, and got all the women in the cast and crew to record the chorus with her. The song "*9 to 5*" won every music award and sold over a million copies. It was the perfect movement anthem for working women.\*

During the filming of *9 to 5* Dolly would tell me stories about growing up in the mountains of Tennessee in a tarpaper shack with eleven brothers and sisters, how they made their own soap and candles, how hard their life was, yet how much joy they had. I also learned that besides her gift for laughter Dolly was an intuitive and savvy businesswoman—mountain savvy. I call it.

There was a project I had been developing for almost a decade, based on a magnificent novel by Harriette Arnow called *The Dollmaker*. My character was a powerful, creative woman from the Appalachian Moun-

\*It was nominated for a Best Song Academy Award and became an RIAA Gold record. The film was one of the top-grossing films of that year. What most amazed Bruce and me was that it appealed almost equally to men. Bruce attributes this to the fact that everyone has, at one time or another, worked for a hellacious boss and had their ideas ripped off or been passed over for promotion, so the theme of employees getting even was appealing across the board.

tains of Kentucky—what we call a hillbilly—who runs her farm, raises her five children, and carves wooden toys for them. She was as far from me as any character I had ever played. I knew I would need to do a lot of research to prepare for her—and here, in the person of Dolly Parton, was my opportunity. Dolly was the only hillbilly I had ever met (until then). Though the script for *The Dollmaker* wasn't right yet, I was already learning to whittle, and every day I would bring my knife and pieces of wood to the set of *9 to 5* so I could practice between shots. If you could tell where Dolly was by her laughter, you could tell where I'd been by the blood and shavings I'd leave behind.

Dolly, along with everyone else on the set, was wondering about my carving. One day over lunch I gave her *The Dollmaker* to read and asked if she would consider helping me find a real mountain woman to spend time with. Dolly immediately understood what I needed and also knew that her part of the country was not easy for outsiders to access. She agreed that when *9 to 5* wrapped she would have me come down to Nashville and together, on her touring bus, we would travel through parts of Appalachia and she would introduce me to her people, mountain people.

When I arrived in Nashville it became immediately clear that Dolly had put a great deal of time and attention into planning our trip, making sure I visited all the people and places that might help with my research for *The Dollmaker*. This moved me deeply. Dolly was and is an enormous star, a busy woman, and despite her amazing ability to be open and accessible in public, she is actually a very private person who does not easily or often open her personal life—her friends and family—to an outsider. I saw it as her way of thanking me for *9 to 5*.

Five of us loaded onto Dolly's touring bus. The back end of the bus was where Dolly had her stateroom and the rest of us slept in narrow bunk beds that lined both sides of the middle part of the bus. During the day we all gathered together up front. In all of those seven days not once did I see Dolly without her wig and makeup. She would appear in the morning looking like a million bucks and looked that way when she disappeared into her room at night. Usually when a woman is that accounted it is because she is trying to hide some defect, but in Dolly's case (and I've spent enough time with her to be able to say this with certainty) if you peeled it all away, what you'd be left with is a true beauty—something, by the way, that runs in her family.

We wound our way through the Smoky Mountains of Tennessee and the Ozarks in Missouri and Arkansas, taking the bus as far as the big vehicle could go and then meeting up with various friends of Dolly's from her early days in radio. Up until then I had supposed that Dolly's ability to tell a good tale was a gift unique to her. Now I was seeing that just about everyone we met on the trip had the storytelling and laughter gift.

Dolly would introduce me and explain that "Jane's wantin' to do a movie 'bout folk like us" and ask if they wouldn't mind talking with me awhile. Usually this ended up with Dolly and me sitting inside a little one-room home without plumbing or electricity. I remember that the walls inside one of the cabins were covered with newspapers to keep out the cold air. There was usually a color print of Jesus hanging somewhere, some plastic flowers, maybe a faded photo of a man in uniform, and usually an old shoebox would be brought out filled with photos and other memorabilia. The folks were invariably in their seventies or eighties and had lots of memories of the Depression times when the mines had closed and many families had to move away, just the way it was for my character in *The Dollmaker*.

There was a town in the Ozarks where Dolly had relatives. They put us up for the night and, as we were pulling out the next morning, presented us with a big ceramic jug of white lightning. "Passed three times," Dolly explained proudly. "It don't git any purer." I learned that each time the homemade alcohol is passed through a gauze filter more impurities are removed, until what's left is on a par with the finest eau-de-vie to be found anywhere in France. I also learned how to hook my thumb through the handle and tip the heavy jug to my lips by balancing it on my arm. We did a lot of tipping during that trip, and though the volume of laughter increased accordingly, I was not aware of being inebriated and never awoke with a hangover. (Though once home it took me a week to recover!)

It was in the Ozarks that I saw my first bottle trees and other startling signs of creative affirmation from people whose art comes not from schools or galleries, but from an inner need to beautify their surroundings with whatever lies within reach, unencumbered by concerns about how others might judge them. There was the home in which every single thing, from tables and chairs to floors and icebox, had been painted with polka dots; another in which the recently deceased owner had cov-

ered every piece of furniture in the house with the tinfoil from gum wrappers. A dead and leafless tree in one yard had been readorned with countless milk of magnesia bottles, resplendent as the sun made magic with their unique blueness. Another tree was hung with years' worth of empty beer cans.

In Arkansas we drove to the home of music historian Jimmy Driftwood, known for, among other things, his song "The Battle of New Orleans." After hearing what I had come to Appalachia for, Jimmy decided he had just the people I needed to meet, whereupon we all piled into someone's car and drove through the mountains till we came to a small hamlet known as Mountain View, and ten minutes or so from there, down a dirt road that wound through the forest, we arrived at a log cabin covered with clematis. There was what appeared to be a zebra in the yard (turned out to be a very striped mule that pulled the family's plow) and several peacocks on the roof. I was sure I'd arrived in the magical kingdom of Oz. Lucy and Waco Johnson, an elderly couple in their seventies, came out to greet us. Lucy was a big-boned woman with short brown hair, thick glasses, and proud new dentures. She carved apple dolls (faces carved into apples that when dry shrivel into interesting weathered expressions). She also carded wool from her own sheep and colored it with dye she made from the vegetables and flowers she grew in abundance. She would then weave lovely small rugs and placemats that she sold at fairs. Like my character in *The Dollmaker*, Lucy was an artist who did not consider herself such. "Busywork" was what she said she did. She was the woman I'd been looking for.

As we prepared to leave I said to Lucy and Waco, "If we ever get the movie script right, I'd like to come back and spend time with you." They nodded, expecting never to see me again.

Three and a half years later I returned. The moment Bruce and I had a good script and a date set for filming, I had written asking if I could come stay with them for two weeks, "but only if you let me work for you and not tell anyone who I am." They were surprised but agreed to the arrangement.

It was Easter and bitter cold in Mountain View. Waco, now seventy-eight, had been chopping wood, the fireplace being their only source of heat, and on my first day there I insisted he let me take over the job. I had never chopped wood in my life, but I figured, Heck, he's in his seventies and I'm the fitness queen. No sweat. I awoke the next morning unable to

move my hands, much less lift my arms. I developed boundless admiration for Waco and realized the depth of the problem that faced folks like them: What would happen when Waco got too old to chop wood? Their children, like most of the young people from the mountains, had moved away to cities and towns. This was a way of life that would soon disappear before most Americans would even know what it had been.

Having proved I was not strong enough to do what old Waco did every day, I moved on to other chores. I milked their cow every morning, collected eggs from the free-roaming chickens, and learned to churn butter in an old wooden churn like the one my mother had made into a floor lamp back on Tigertail Road. I went with Waco into the woods, where he shot a possum and showed me how to skin it. Lucy told me how to find a sassafras tree and use the bark to season the possum, which I cooked for dinner on the wood-burning stove. (I didn't like it. It was greasy and had too many tiny bones.) Lucy also taught me to make scratch biscuits (biscuits from scratch) and cook them in the fireplace in a heavy iron Dutch oven. I learned about sorghum and how you could slather it on bread, what a back log was (the largest log that you'd put at the back of the fire), how to carve apple dolls, and how a late spring frost could wipe out the garden and leave them short of food.

We all slept in the same room with sheets hung on wires between the beds for privacy. They were iron beds with old, sagging springs and lightweight feather mattresses so thick that I had a hard time crawling out in the morning. Every evening after supper we would sit on their well-worn sofa in front of the huge stone fireplace and they would tell stories and jokes and sometimes play their instruments and sing. It dawned on me (duh!) why everyone we'd met told great stories and played at least one instrument. Without electricity there was no radio or television to entertain them. They had only each other, and especially on those cold mountain nights, the arts of storytelling and music were precious as gold. I wondered: Was this special art of talking to one another every day in danger of extinction for those of us "blessed" with electricity?

On Easter Sunday Lucy and Waco brought me with them to church. It was a one-room whitewashed structure heated by a woodstove. The preacher stared intently at me over its rusty top. He wore denim overalls and his hands showed he was a hardworking farmer like Waco. Suddenly he said, "You know, you look mighty like Jane Fonda. Anyone ever tell you that?" I ducked my head and mumbled something, praying that

Lucy wouldn't tell and that he wouldn't say something nasty. Instead he said, "Well, I don't know what you think, but I think she's a brave lady." I nodded in silent agreement and wanted to hug him.

During the service there was a good deal of back-and-forthing between the preacher and the congregation—the men in the congregation, that is. No woman said a word. When I asked Lucy about this later, she told me that women were forbidden to play any role in the service. She also told me that just down the way was another church where people drank arsenic and handled live rattlesnakes.

I felt privileged to have been permitted for a time to know this world and its people . . . a world that as late as 1984 was probably not so different from that of my pioneer ancestors. I was saddened by the thought that in a few decades it might all be developed, hooked up to "civilization."



## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

ON  
GOLDEN POND

*Sometimes you have to look very hard at a person  
and remember he's doing the best he can.*

—ETHEL THAYER,  
*On Golden Pond*

I DON'T LIKE YOU!" said Katharine Hepburn, pointing her finger straight at my face, her anger making the famous voice and classic head, which quivered at the best of times, shake with tsunamiic tremors. I had never met the legendary actor before, and it was a terrible moment, coming within minutes of my arrival with Bruce at her Fortyninth Street town house—terrible not only because someone only a notch below God was damning me, but also because in less than two weeks she was supposed to travel to New Hampshire to begin rehearsing *On Golden Pond* with my father and me.

Katharine Hepburn was critical to the financing of this film. No American studio thought anyone would want to see a movie about two old people and a kid. On top of that, my father was suffering from heart disease that was serious enough to keep us from getting insurance coverage for the film. Everything depended on all of us working for far less than our usual salaries, and if we lost Katharine Hepburn, the whole project would be doomed.

It was difficult for me to know exactly what was at the root of her anger with me. She was famously liberal, so I knew it had nothing to do

## ON GOLDEN POND

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with my politics. It seemed to have something to do with my not having been present at her first encounter with my father (my having chosen instead to make the bus trip with Dolly). Despite their decades in the same profession, knowing many of the same people, Hepburn and Fonda had never met until now, and though my company was producing the film, it had never dawned on me that my presence at this coming together of two Hollywood icons was necessary. For better or worse, the need for homage had never reared its head in my twenty-five years in the business. It never dawned on me that Katharine Hepburn would perceive my absence at the meeting as a lack of respect.

There was another factor at play: The seventy-three-year-old Ms. Hepburn had dislocated her rotator cuff and torn a tendon in her shoulder while playing tennis. Our visit was in order to ascertain whether or not she would be able to begin filming on schedule.

Shortly on the heels of "I don't like you" came "I'm afraid I'm not going to be able to do this film, Jane," announced with the certainty of a New England Brahmin. "I don't think my shoulder will get well fast enough to do it, and there are those scenes where I'd have to lug wood and carry the canoe into the water. So you'd just better go ahead and get Geraldine Page or someone to take over." She reminded me of myself with Alan Pakula before starting *Kluge*.

But then suddenly she was on to film credits—whose name would be above whose. I was relieved, because it meant she was still seeing herself in the movie; but I couldn't fathom why she would see the credits as a problem. I just assumed she and my father would get top billing and that my name, as a supporting actress, would run beneath theirs. Then it hit me. She suspected that I might want billing above hers. *Oh my God!* It never would have occurred to me to feel competitive with Katharine Hepburn or to expect any special treatment because of my producing role! Film credits and such things that serve as outward proof of one's standing had never been especially important to me: You do a good job and people take notice is the way I see it. But maybe this competitiveness is what separates the legends from the mere movie stars. I was more like my father, comfortable in an egalitarian context, and I've always tended to forget that everyone is not like this. I realized that this whole meeting, for her, was a testing of the waters to determine whether I knew my place . . . and, if not, to put me in it.

Once I realized this I could see how vulnerable she felt. She was a

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legend, yes. But I was the younger actress who because of youth was currently more of a box office draw—and I was only one Oscar behind her. (This was on her mind, as will become clear.) She was used to being in charge; but my company was producing the film as a vehicle for my father, and I was in the driver's seat. Moreover I had not conformed to her need for approbation. Now, with her injury, she probably thought I might want to replace her. I quickly realized that her opening salvo had been her instinctive way to put me on the defensive—I *don't like you!*—and by announcing she wasn't going to be in the film, she was assuming the offensive, getting out before I replaced her, scoping out where she stood in the delicate balance of power and protocol. From the moment I sensed what was really going on, it was easy to open my heart to her.

I apologized for not being there when she and Dad met and said that under no circumstances would we replace her, that she was critical to the film (which was true), and that we would do whatever was necessary in terms of schedule to ensure that she had time to heal.

"Geraldine Page is a brilliant actress, Ms. Hepburn. I've worked with her. But what will make this film magic is the pairing of you and my dad—and that's what we will make happen, whatever it takes."

When she began offering ideas about how the scene with the canoe could be rigged to ease the burden on her shoulder, I knew that she had never been ready to leave the project. She was just testing us.

No sooner was the issue of her being in the movie put to rest than she issued another challenge: "Are you going to do the backflip yourself, Jane?" She looked at me and I think I saw a twinkle in her eyes.

In the film, the backflip plays an important role in my character's relationship with her father. She hadn't been able to do it as a youngster because according to him she was too fat. But this summer, as a grown and newly married woman, she decides to prove to him that she is now able. But holy s—! I had no intention of doing the dive *myself*. A stunt double was already lined up to do it for me. For one thing, I have a phobia about going over backward, and for another, I hate cold water. But the moment the question left Ms. Hepburn's mouth, the image of *her* doing that perfect dive in *The Philadelphia Story* came into my mind, and I knew what my answer would have to be.

"Of course I am going to do the dive myself, Ms. Hepburn. But I'll have to learn how because I've never done one." I'd be damned before I'd let on that I was scared.



Chelsa, Norman, and Ethel Thayer in On Golden Pond.  
(© Steve Schapiro)

The meeting ended with friendly embraces all around. Ms. Hepburn announced that ten days hence she and her companion and employee, Phyllis Wilbourn, would be driving up to Squam Lake to choose a house for themselves, and we arranged to meet them when they arrived.

Once Phyllis had shown us out the front door and we'd exited the wrought-iron gate to the sidewalk, I walked far enough away from her windows so there was no risk of Ms. Hepburn seeing me and sat on the curb, right there on Forty-ninth Street. I was dazed. Within the space of one hour we'd gone from "I hate you" and "I'm not going to be in the movie" to "I'm going up to choose my house." I'd been given a preview of what clearly would be a complicated and challenging relationship with our leading lady. I had my work cut out for me.

"Bruce, take me somewhere, I need a stiff drink."

Wanting to check out the housing situation before Ms. Hepburn got there, I went to Squam Lake, a wild, pristine body of water, big and irregularly shaped, with small islands scattered about that made it impossible to see from one end to the other.

Bruce and his wife were already settled into a pleasant camp (that's what homes on Squam Lake are called) on the far side of the lake and had lined up a number of summer rentals for me to look at. Over the course of the three months we would be there, Vanessa, Troy, Tom, and our German shepherd, Geronimo, would be living with me, and plans had been made for CED's entire steering committee, all ten of them, to come up for some strategy sessions. I needed a large house.

Shirlee had already picked out a place for herself and Dad. It was a guest house close to a spacious two-story, eight-bedroom, brick main house that sat on a hill with a wide lawn that swooped down to the lake. The main house was perfect for my considerable needs, and besides, it was right next to Dad. There was another camp to the north, much smaller but cozy, with a beautiful bay window overlooking the water and a number of small outlying rustic cabins—perfect, I thought, for Ms. Hepburn and the ever attentive Phyllis.

At the appointed time Bruce and I drove to the parking lot of the restaurant where we had arranged to rendezvous with them. Within minutes their station wagon pulled up, and Ms. Hepburn got out and came over to me.

"Well, have you picked your house yet, Jane?" In that instant I knew that I had to throw out my assumptions about who would take which house.

"I have seen a number of houses, Ms. Hepburn, but you make your choice first and I'll take what's left."

"Now you're talking!" she said with a big grin, knowing I'd learned my lesson and wasn't about to make the same mistake again. Whew! It had been a close call. Ms. Hepburn and Phyllis in a cozy little cabin? What *could* I have been thinking? She chose the eight-bedroom mansion.

Let me provide a little backstory: For years I had wanted to do a movie in which all the Fondas—Henry, Peter, and I—could act together. When Bruce saw the play *On Golden Pond* in New York he wanted to buy it right away, as time was of the essence: Dad had been increasingly in and out of hospitals with heart disease and a variety of complications that resulted from it, and I knew there wasn't a lot of time left for us to work together. Even though there was no role for Peter and mine was very much a supporting one, I believed that in the role of Norman Thayer, Dad would win the Oscar that had eluded him for so long. I wanted to make that happen for him.

Mark Rydell had agreed to direct the film, and Ernest Thompson, the young author of the play, would rework it for the screen.

The film tells of an elderly couple who have summered for decades on a lake in Maine called Golden Pond. Norman, a moody curmudgeon played by my father, is about to turn eighty, and his daughter, Chelsea, en route to Europe with her fiancé, has planned to stop by the lake for his birthday party. Along with them is the fiancé's thirteen-year-old son, Billy, whom they hope to leave with Chelsea's parents for a month while they travel. Chelsea, a real estate agent who lives in California, has had a troubled, distant relationship with her father all her life and has made a point of not visiting her parents because of it—something that has hurt her father, though she doesn't even realize he cares.

Young Billy is angry, feeling as though he's been dumped someplace boring with a couple of "old poops"; but in the course of the summer Norman and Billy bond as Norman never has with his own daughter. He teaches Billy to fish and to execute a fine backflip (the dive Chelsea was never able to accomplish), and Billy teaches Norman such expressions as



"cruisin' chicks," "suck face," and "San Fran-tastic." We can feel Norman's heart soften because of this relationship with Billy, and when Chelsea returns from Europe to fetch the boy, she sees this and gets jealous. With her mother's encouragement Chelsea is finally able to muster the courage to confront her father, telling him she wants them to be friends, and he is able to show his love for her for the first time. The main fabric of the story is the touching fifty-year-long relationship between Norman and his wife, Ethel, played by Hepburn. It is deeply touching when he loses his way in the woods while trying to pick strawberries and comes running home to her. So is the scene when he suffers acute angina and she tells him how scared she is of losing him. The two of them bring a rare poignancy to these scenes, and I for one cannot watch them without sobbing uncontrollably.

Time was of the essence. Because of my father's failing health, we all knew it was this summer or never. *On Golden Pond* is a summer story, and we had to get it done by early fall, when the deciduous hardwood trees so characteristic of that part of New England would begin to turn their fall colors.

Cinematographer Billy Williams had insisted on finding a lake that ran east to west, because it would give him a certain kind of light he felt was essential. Our location scout visited over one hundred lakes from the Carolinas to Maine, but Squam was apparently the only one on the East Coast that met this requirement. Then there was the unusual fact that while almost all other lakes were rimmed with summer homes, Squam seemed frozen in time. It was hard to believe that a place so beautiful was so undeveloped (until someone introduced me to the term *conservation by exclusion*: All the land bordering the lake is owned by wealthy families who intend to keep it undeveloped).

So we were working against time: the season changing, Ms. Hepburn's injured rotator cuff, and my father's health. Also, an actors strike was looming against the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) and it threatened to shut down all productions. We hoped that if we had actually started shooting before the strike began, they wouldn't ask us to stop. We were wrong. The actors struck, and we got the call to shut down. Bruce spent three desperate days arguing that because we were with ITC, a British independent company, not an MPAA studio, we didn't

fall under their jurisdiction. He was successful in getting a waiver that allowed us to continue. Had that not occurred, *On Golden Pond* would never have been made.

Once rehearsals had begun, Ms. Hepburn would invite me over to her house for tea. We'd sit in the comfortable white wicker chairs that were scattered about her glassed-in porch and she would tell me how I should play my role. I'm serious—and so was she. Ms. Hepburn would have me read her part and she'd read mine and give me line readings. Though I was stunned by this, I never let on that I found it . . . well, strange. I did not want to offend her.

I never tired of looking at her. Though in her mid-seventies, she was still magnificent. It was part attitude and part bone structure. I realized that if the architecture of a face is upward reaching (those cheekbones!) and properly proportioned, as hers was, it mattered not if the skin that was draped over the scaffolding was wrinkled and blotched . . . the essential beauty held. Aging takes more of a toll on less structured faces.

Though she told me once that she thought the two of us were very much alike—both strong, independent, liberal-minded women—she also let me know what she saw as our differences. For one thing, she thought I should be more involved on a day-to-day basis with the film production, which of course is how she was in her heyday—involved in all the details from casting to lighting. She has been quoted as saying, "Acting was all I ever wanted to do," but I wasn't like that. I loved acting, especially once I began producing my own pictures, but it was one important part of my life among others. I had my children, my ongoing political work with CED, the new Workout business to help fund it all . . . and a dog. (Ms. Hepburn wasn't big on pets, either.) But I know Ms. Hepburn looked askance at all of this; she simply didn't understand the concept of having a working partner like Bruce, of having a business unrelated to my profession, and of putting as much or more time into political work as I did into my career. Ms. Hepburn was livid that CED's steering committee were all there, living at our camp (the smaller one, which I'd thought appropriate for Ms. Hepburn and Phyllis) in cabins and tents. She thought it was unpardonable for me not to be 100 percent concentrated on the film. We had to wait for a day when we were utterly certain Ms. Hepburn would not be coming to the set before we could invite the CED organizers to pay a visit and watch the shooting.

Of course, the idea of an actor having children was anathema to

her. She told me that she had never wanted children because she thought she was too selfish. "If I'd had a child," she said, "and the child got sick and was crying just as I had to leave for the theater, where hundreds of people were waiting for me to perform, and I had to make a choice—the play or the child—well, I'd smother the child to death and go on with the show. You just can't have both," she said with frightening certainty, "a career *and* children."

I don't think she was right, at least not for me. Maybe for her she was: To have had the career she wanted perhaps required 100 percent attention. I do know that I felt terrible after these conversations. They played to my tendency to feel that I should be handling my life differently, more like . . . I don't know. There was always a roster of women whose lives seemed more sensible than mine, just as there was always a list of actresses who could do my part better than I. I stayed awake many a night fretting about this, feeling sure that she was right, that my kids would be totally screwed up because of me.

But guess what. They aren't. In fact, my kids have grown up to be amazing, talented, well-balanced, lovable people. Not that I can take credit for it all, but still. Anyway, I am what I am. In a 1978 interview in *Rolling Stone*, Donald Katz wrote about me, "No one else has ever stepped out to such a band of new drummers in the movie world and maintained a career."

On more than one occasion during those teatime conversations, Ms. Hepburn talked of her relationship with actresses Constance Collier and Ethel Barrymore, both elders with whom she seemed to have assigned herself the role of acolyte. She described how when Barrymore was hospitalized toward the end of her life, Hepburn would visit her regularly. She told me about this so often that I began to wonder if she was hoping for a younger actress who would befriend her—and whether perhaps the actress she had in mind was me. I was never sure. But she was more comfortable with people who had no other attachments, not even pets.

She talked a lot about the importance of her parents in her life, always speaking of them as the most wonderful, fascinating parents anyone could have and crediting them with making her what she was. Apparently her habit of swimming every morning when she was at her country house in Connecticut, even in winter, had been developed at an early age. She told me that her father had insisted all his children take baths in a tub filled with ice every morning before school. When I sug-

gested that this might be considered child abuse, she said, "Oh no, that is what builds character; and that is why I have such a strong constitution and never get sick." I wasn't convinced but kept my mouth shut.

She told me that every morning in the city she would get up at 5:00 A.M., have breakfast in bed, and write about her life's experiences. One chapter, she said, was called "Failure" and described her monumental failure in a Broadway play called *The Lake*.

"One reviewer said, 'Go see Katharine Hepburn run the gamut of emotions from A to B,'" she said with a snort. "I'm writing about how you learn more from failure than you ever do from success." On that one I agree with her.

Having learned my lesson, I was not about to miss a second historic event, so I was present on the first day of shooting, even though I was not in the scene. Ms. Hepburn was all made up and waiting for my father on the front steps of the house in which we were filming. She had a twin-kle in her eye and we could tell she was hiding something behind her back. As soon as Dad arrived, she walked up to him and said, "Here, Hank. This was Spence's favorite hat. I want you to have it for this film." Dad was clearly moved by this gesture from his leading lady, as were we all. In the course of the film he wore three different hats and Spencer Tracy's was one of them. When the film ended, he made a painting of the three hats, so real that you could feel their texture; he had lithograph copies made and presented one to every member of the cast and crew.

My first day of filming was the scene of my arrival at my parents' summer home with my fiancé and his son. Ms. Hepburn had not seen me in costume and makeup. She took one look at my high-heeled shoes and disappeared, returning a few minutes later in a pair of her old platform shoes from the thirties, which increased her height by at least two inches. That's when I remembered that height was important to her. (I'd read that she'd brought it up in her first encounter with Spencer Tracy, telling him, "You're not as tall as I expected." This prompted producer Joseph Mankiewicz's famous comment, "Don't worry, Kate, he'll soon cut you down to size.") I suppose that for her, height established dominance. She'd be damned if she'd let me tower over her.

That same day, between takes, I was standing in front of the mirror that hung near the front door where Norman's hats were hung when Ms. Hepburn surprised me by coming up behind me. She reached around and took a chunk of my cheek between her fingers.

"What does this mean to you?" she asked, pulling on my cheek.

"What do you mean?"

"Your image. What do you want your image to be?" She gave my cheek another little tug. "This is your package. We all have our package, what presents us to the world. What do you want your package to say about you?"

"I have no idea," I answered.

But I thought a lot about this for days afterward and still do today. (That's the thing about Ms. Hepburn: She got under my skin and stirred things up.) I think I now know why she asked me the question. She thought I needed to be more self-conscious about my image. That's what she felt movie stars needed to do—God knows she did. She had a persona, a style particular to her that will live on in the minds of her public, and she never wavered from it. I, on the other hand, was a hodgepodge, still searching for who I was, lacking self-consciousness about my persona, and this bothered her. She didn't want me to be this way; it was one more thing about me that she didn't approve of. We tend to think of the term *self-consciousness* as meaning something bad, as being awkward or uncomfortable with oneself. But the way I am using it it means something rather different—a *consciousness of self*, the impact our presence has on other people. The only other person I have known as self-conscious is Ted Turner. And, as it was with Hepburn, it's part of his charm.

Everything about our summer on Squam Lake was magical. Even nature wanted to get in on the act. Take the loon, for instance. The loon is a wondrous bird about the size of a small goose, with dramatic black-and-white markings and a haunting cry that resembles the trill of distant laughter. It dives underwater to catch fish and nests in the lake-rich areas of the northern regions. In the winter it migrates to warmer climes. Loons mate for life, the males and females share in the rearing of their children, and for all of us they became emblematic of the film's couple, Ethel and Norman Thayer. Loons are shy, wary of humans. One rarely gets the opportunity to watch them up close, but one day some crew members were eating lunch down by the lake's edge and one of them suddenly came running, calling us to come down. A family of loons, mama, papa, and several babies, were just a few feet offshore and

seemed to want to stay there. The camera operator grabbed the camera and filmed them, and they hung out there for several days, as though knowing that this film would be wonderful and wanting to be a part of it. They are the first image you see in the film.

From the moment I arrived in New Hampshire, I began taking backflip lessons from the University of Maine's swimming coach, who summered near Squam Lake. I started with a belt around my waist, hooked up to a rope that assisted me in the flip, with a mattress to cushion the fall. After a week or so I graduated to the coach's diving board, and Troy would sit poolside and watch his mother's pathetic attempts to get herself all the way around, which generally ended with me landing on my back. I was terrified, always on the verge of tossing in the towel. After a month of this I moved to the float, the one in the movie, in front of the house, out in Squam Lake. It was the beginning of July, and I had less than a month to get it right. Every day when I wasn't needed on the set I would be out there, diving backward, over and over again, my body slapping against the water as I failed to make it around.

Then one day about three weeks into this ordeal on the lake, I finally got it right. Nothing to write home about, but I had managed to flip far enough over to have time to straighten my legs and enter the water head-first. I wasn't sure I'd ever be able to do it again, but at least I'd done it *once*. As I crawled, battered and bruised, onto the shore, out of the nearby bushes appeared Ms. Hepburn. She must have been hiding there, watching me practice. She walked over to where I was standing and said in her shaky, nasal, God-is-a-New-Englander voice, "Don't you feel good?"

"Terrific," I answered. And it was true.

"You've taught me to respect you, Jane. You faced your fear. Everyone should know that feeling of overcoming fear and mastering something. People who aren't taught that become soggy."

*Thank you, Lord!* I'd been redeemed. God knows the last thing in the world I wanted to be was soggy, certainly not in the eyes of Ms. Hepburn, a living testament to nonsogginess. It was odd. In the film the backflip was to prove myself to my father. In real life I had proved myself to Ms. Hepburn. Dad probably couldn't have cared less if I'd done the dive myself or used a stunt double.

We finally shot the diving scene in the third week of July. I managed



a fairly good dive and was relieved to have it out of the way. Wrong, wrong, wrong, as Ms. Hepburn would say. A few days later we learned that the footage of the scene had somehow been damaged in the lab and I would have to do it all again. As though that weren't bad enough, when we finally got around to reshooting, it was mid-September and the water was numbingly cold. I will never forget having to walk out on the diving board, all wet and shivering, while the crew sat in the camera boat in their down parkas. I was out of practice and too cold to execute the dive as well as I had the first time. When I came to the surface and said, "I did it! It was lousy, but at least I did it," those were my own words, spontaneous and totally true.

There is a scene where Dad and Ms. Hepburn are playing Parcheesi and I'm sitting on the couch reading a magazine. Dad makes a remark about my not wanting to play because I'm afraid to lose. I respond, "Why do you like playing games? You seem to like beating people. I wonder why." After we shot the master and the crew had finished lighting for my close-up, I got into place and realized that there were so many lights on me that I couldn't see Dad's eyes, which would hinder my playing of this brief, hostile exchange. It was easy to fix; I just asked the cameraman to throw a little light onto his face. That done, it was time for Dad's close-up, and just before we were set to go, I asked, "Is it okay, Dad? Can you see my eyes?"

"I don't need to see your eyes," he answered dismissively, "I'm not that kind of actor."

Whoa. His words pierced me to my core. It felt like such a put-down. Forget that I had made this project happen for him. Forget my two Academy Awards, that I was the mother of two children, forget all of that. I was suddenly reduced to a quivering, insecure fat girl, in the same way my character is. As Chelsea says to her mother in another scene, "I act like a big person everywhere else. In California I'm in charge of things . . . yet I get back here with him and I'm just a fat little girl again!" I could relate to that.

And yet—and this is what makes life so interesting for actors; hell, maybe it is why some of us *become* actors—while one part of me was in emotional agony because of his comment, the other half of me was saying, *Oh my God—this is so great. This is exactly the way I'm supposed to feel. This is just perfect for the character.*

When the scene was over and everyone had prepared to go home for the day, I remained on the couch, unable to move but sure that no one was aware how Dad's words had hurt me.

To my surprise Ms. Hepburn came over and sat next to me, put her arms around me, and whispered in my ear, "I know just how you feel, Jane. Spence used to do things like that to me all the time. He'd tell me to go home after I'd done my close-up, say that he didn't need me to be around, he could do his lines just as well to the script girl. Please don't feel badly. Your dad has no idea that his words hurt you. He didn't mean to. He's just like Spence." I was deeply grateful for her understanding and compassion. It showed me it hadn't all been my imagination. I had a witness; I wasn't alone.

Speaking about her experience on the movie, Ms. Hepburn told her friend and biographer A. Scott Berg, "It was strange. . . . There was certainly a whole layer of drama going on in the scenes between her [me] and Hank, and I think she came by to watch every scene he and I had together. There was a feeling of longing about her." She was right about the longing. I longed for him to love me and see me as an able grown-up. And for me to do so, too!

*On Golden Pond* is an archetypal story of love and loyalty, but it's also about the difficulty of resolving generational differences when a parent is withholding and a child is angry because of it. Of all the films I have made, none seems to have resonated so profoundly with so many people as this one. I realize the universality of the dilemma, because people—men and women—to this day go out of their way to tell me how their relationships with their fathers resemble Chelsea and Norman's. In many cases, they tell me that it was taking their fathers to see the movie that enabled a breakthrough to occur.

Isn't one of the difficulties knowing who should make the first move? The child is angry because the parent hasn't been what he or she should have been, and the child waits for the deficient parent to admit he or she was terrible and to ask forgiveness. But it's harder to change when you are older. You know you've made mistakes, but you don't understand this new generation and you're stuck in your ways (unless you keep working on yourself to not get stuck). Playing Chelsea in *On Golden Pond* and paying attention to the advice her mother gives her allowed me to see that it has to be the *child* who makes the move toward forgiveness

and that if it is done from a loving place, the parent will almost always be there to receive. One important caveat that Ethel gives Chelsea: "Sometimes you have to look very hard at a person and remember he's doing the best he can."

Everyone on the set was sensitive to the fact that my father and I had had a complex relationship and that this film in many ways mirrored real life—but with a resolution at the end. I hoped that somehow the resolution between father and daughter in the film would lap over to Dad and me. He always said that acting gave him a mask that allowed him to reveal emotions he did not feel safe revealing in real life. Maybe showing his emotion about his daughter in the film would release the real ones.

There is a scene with the mother when Chelsea comes back from Europe to pick up Billy. She is hurt that her father has developed such a close relationship with the boy, and her mother is trying to get her to realize that underneath the gruff exterior her father loves her, that she just needs to talk to him and pay close attention.

"I'm afraid of him," says Chelsea.

"Well, he's afraid of you. The two of you should get along just fine."

"I don't even know him," Chelsea says plaintively.

"Chelsea," the mother admonishes, "Norman is eighty years old. He has heart palpitations and trouble remembering things. Just exactly when do you expect this friendship to begin?"

The scene that follows is my key scene in the movie, the one where I confront my father. I wade into the water by the dock as Norman and Billy pull up from their fishing trip. "Norman, I want to talk to you."

"Oh yeah, what about?" he says dismissively.

"I think maybe you and I should have the kind of relationship we're supposed to have."

"What kind of relationship is that?" Norman snaps.

"You know, like a father and daughter. . . ."

"Worried about the will, are you? Well, I'm leaving everything to you except what I'm taking with me."

Chelsea begins to choke up. She fears her attempt at contact will end just like all the others. "I don't want anything. . . . It's just . . . it seems you and I have been mad at each other for so long."

"I didn't think we were mad. I just didn't think we liked each other."

Chelsea is stunned by this cruelty but persists. "I want to be your friend." And she places her hand on his arm.

From the first, every time I read the script I would come to that scene and tears would pour down my cheeks. In rehearsals I was so emotional that it was hard to speak the lines. Finally the day of reckoning came. I woke up and ran to the bathroom to vomit, more scared than I had ever been before a scene and knowing it was because I had to say intimate words to my father that I had never been able to say in real life. We blocked the scene for the camera and lighting crew, he in the boat, me waist-deep in the water. Even then I was nearly overcome with emotion.

We began with the wide shot that included the two of us, the boat, and the pier. Though I knew a scene like this was ultimately going to play in close-up, I was unable to hold back my emotions. Next we shot over my shoulder onto Dad, and still I gave it my all, partly because I couldn't help myself and partly because I wanted him to be emotional, too. As I have written in an earlier chapter, I waited until his last shot to touch his arm as I tell him I want to be his friend—I wanted to take him by surprise. It worked. Tears welled in his eyes and he ducked his head, not wanting it to show. But it did. I was so happy.

Then the camera swung around for my close-up. We did a rehearsal for the camera and . . . *oh, no*, the actor's ultimate nightmare: I was bone dry, spent, unable to call up any emotions. No one knew it, of course, because this was just a rehearsal, but I panicked. What to do? It wasn't that I had to be overtly emotional in the scene, but I needed to *feel* emotional and then stifle it. I tried to relax, as Strasberg would have wanted. I tried all the sense-memories I had, sang my old song that always made me cry, everything. But nothing seemed to work. As I was pacing around on shore waiting for the camera to be ready (dreading that the camera would be ready), up came Ms. Hepburn. She wasn't even supposed to be on set that day, but there she was. She looked at me.

"How are you?" she asked, sensing something.

"I'm in trouble. I've gone dry. Please don't tell Dad," I answered weakly, and then I was called to the set. The time of reckoning had come.

Hoping that some last-minute miracle would unleash my heart, I said to Mark, "I'm going to turn my back to the camera while I prepare, and when I turn around, it means that I'm ready for you to roll." He understood.

I turned away to prepare, though I had no idea what to do, and as I was staring at the shore, trying to relax and bring myself into the scene, there was Hepburn, crouching in the bushes just within my line of vi-

sion. Nobody could see her but me. She fixed me intensely with her eyes, and slowly she raised her clenched fists and shook them as if to say "Do it! Go ahead. You can do this!" She was willing me into the scene: Katharine Hepburn to Jane Fonda; mother to daughter; older actress, who'd been there and knew about drying up, to younger actress. It was all those layers of things and more. *Do it! Do it! You can! I know it.* With her energy she literally gave me the scene, gave it to me with her fists, her eyes, and her generosity, and I will never, ever forget it.

That night I asked Dad and Shirlee if I could come over to dinner. The scene had been so utterly personal for me, so intimate in a way that he and I had never been. I was raw and felt so close to him, and I needed to acknowledge it and see if he felt the same. I wanted to tell him how terrifying it had been to dry up like I did, and to ask if this had ever happened to him—at least, you know, share some actor's talk. But mostly I wanted to know if he had changed in any way as a result of the intimacy.

I told him about drying up and asked if such a thing had ever happened to him.

"Nope."

I couldn't believe it. "Never? Not once in your whole career?"

"Nope."

My heart sank. That was it, just "Nope." Why did these things happen to me and not to him? What was I doing wrong? Moreover it was all too clear that he was no more open or forthcoming now than he'd been before the scene. I was so sad. I felt like a dope for getting all soft and fuzzy over what to him was obviously just a scene.

Katharine Hepburn told Scott Berg, "Hank Fonda was the hardest nut I ever tried to crack. But I didn't know any more about him after we had made the picture than I did at the beginning. Cold. Cold. Cold."

Yup.

On the set one day, Ms. Hepburn told our unit publicist that she thought it was the duty of a star to be fascinating. There is no denying that the lady worked hard to do her duty and as a result was one of the two most fascinating people I have known (the other being Ted Turner). But despite this and despite my father's coldness, in the genetic scheme of things I am glad I am my father's daughter. I never loved him more than when I watched him, day after day, as he sat on the set between takes in



Ethel telling Chelsea to talk to her father.  
(© Steve Schapiro)



I've just brought Dad his Academy Award. Left to right: Bridget Fonda, Amy Fonda, Tom, me, Vanessa, Shirlee, and Troy with his back to the camera.



his canvas chair with his name printed on the back panel, waiting to be called before the cameras: quiet, demanding little, *not* looking to fascinate. He was what he was.

*On Golden Pond* was the largest-grossing film of 1981. The studios were wrong: People *did* want to see this movie about old folks . . . because it spoke of universal issues with pathos and humor. Never has a movie of mine had such a profound personal impact on people; never have people crossed the street just to hug me and tell me that seeing it, and then bringing their fathers to see it, had altered their relationships forever. This has moved me and gladdened me greatly over the years.

The film received *ten* Academy Award nominations, among them Best Picture, Best Actor, Best Actress, Best Supporting Actress, and Best Screenplay. Dad was too ill to attend the ceremony, and given his lifelong antipathy for awards and competition, I'm not sure he would have gone even if he had been well enough. But he intended to watch the proceedings with Shirlee from his bed. Ms. Hepburn did not attend, either. The first one of us to win (for Best Writing, Screenplay Based on Material from *Another Medium*) was Ernest Thompson, who actually leapt with joy as he crossed the stage. I did not win Best Supporting Actress (losing to the remarkable Maureen Stapleton playing the radical Emma Goldman in *Reds*). Eight-year-old Troy was sitting next to me, and as the names of the nominees for Best Actress were being read, I saw him drop his head and squeeze his eyes tight. When Katharine Hepburn's name was announced as the winner (for an unprecedented fourth time), Troy tugged excitedly on my arm and whispered, "Mom, I prayed she'd win and my prayer was answered."

Then Sissy Spacek came out to present the award for Best Actor. For all his great performances, Dad had been nominated only once before, for Tom Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath*. This time he had stiff competition: Warren Beatty, Burt Lancaster, Dudley Moore, and Paul Newman. There was nothing I wanted more in life than for him to finally win. This was my fervent prayer. When Sissy opened the envelope and announced his name, the theater erupted in applause and cheering; I went up onstage to claim the Oscar on his behalf, as he had asked me to in the event he won. It was the happiest moment of my life.

Tom, Troy, Vanessa, and I left the ceremony immediately, along with

Amy (the daughter Susan and Dad had adopted at birth) and my niece, Bridget Fonda, to carry the statue to him. He was sitting in his wheelchair next to the bed when we arrived.

Shirlee was right next to him, as always.

Watching his face closely, I could see he was pleased. When I asked him how he felt, all he said was, "I'm so happy for Kate."

The next morning I called Ms. Hepburn to congratulate her and her first words to me were, "You'll never catch me now!"

It took a moment for me to understand what she was talking about, and then it hit me. Of course—if she *hadn't* won and I *had*, we'd be tied with three Oscars each. Now she had four, and I had only two. No way I'd catch up. I had to laugh. We were still operating on different wavelengths, but how could I not love her spunk?

Dad died five months later.

# CLOSURE

*Maybe a fella hasn't got a soul of his own, just a piece of a big soul—the one big soul that belongs to everybody.*

—TOM JOAD IN JOHN STEINBECK'S  
*The Grapes of Wrath*

THE END CAME SLOWLY. Following the filming of *On Golden Pond* and before its release, I visited Dad's home in Bel-Air as often as I could. There he'd be, sitting in the kitchen in his wheelchair or, more and more frequently, in his bed. Shirlee worked hard to make him look dignified for these visits, dressing him in natty cashmere cardigans. He would be awake but remote, already gone from us on some level. At such times I would sit with Shirlee and make small talk, glancing over at him occasionally, hoping that the inner world into which he seemed to have retreated was filled with curtain calls, tumultuous applause, and visions of the kites that he and Jimmy Stewart had flown as youths.

During this time I enjoyed being able to please him in little ways. I would cook him pork roast and bring him crisp, tart pears from an old pear tree we had at the ranch, things I knew he loved. It's a strange pleasure—when a parent you have always feared, who has never seemed to need you, becomes old and weak and you are finally able to do for him. Being able to give him the nurture he had not given me filled me with an almost spiritual satisfaction. I wished he were poor and needed me more.

One day I was allowed into the intensive care unit at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, where he had been rushed during a close call. It was the first time I had seen him like that, all hooked up to IVs and monitors, sunken and pale, with dark bruising on his arms and hands from the



Dad blowing out his seventy-seventh-birthday candles at home.  
Left to right: me, Tom, Shirlee, Troy, and Vanessa.

(© Suzanne Tenner)



Dad loved me to rub his feet.

(© Suzanne Tenner)

needles. He seemed to be asleep, so I pulled up a chair, sat at the end of his bed, lifted the ends of the sheets, and began rubbing his feet. Dad had suffered with painful gout in his feet for as long as I could remember, and I knew gentle massage helped relieve it. I loved being able to touch him like that, even though he was unaware. It created an intimacy, albeit one-way, we'd never had. I must have sat there massaging his beautiful, long, pale feet for twenty minutes; then, fearing I'd overstayed my time, I stood up and got halfway to the door when a weak voice that seemed to come from far away said: "Don't stop." He had been awake all along!

There were the times I'd sit by his bedside looking at him, his eyes closed, wondering if he was asleep or just avoiding talking to me. I wanted to ask him if he was in pain, if he'd seen any angels yet, if he could see to the other side, if he was scared. I never did. Shirlee hadn't allowed any of us to admit he wasn't going to get better, so we all went around pretending he'd be up and about in no time. I hated it. It all rang so false, but I felt I had to honor her wishes; it was she, after all, who was living through this with him night and day, being the loving caretaker. But I often wondered if it was Dad who needed to believe this or Shirlee. Personally I'd rather know when the jig is almost up so as to be intentional about that last kiss, that final "I love you." But that's just me.

Perhaps it didn't matter and my desire to communicate with him was futile. After all, how could I expect him to do something he'd never done, be someone he'd never been, now at the end? How could I talk to him about feelings now, when it was almost over? Yet I knew he had feelings. I'd seen him laugh hard when he was with his men friends or when he'd had a drink or two. I saw him cry, once—the day Roosevelt died. He was standing in his vegetable garden, and I was very little, and he never saw me there watching.

Another day I went to his home and found him sitting in a chair in his room with a lap rug over his knees. He had been moved into the same downstairs back room where I had lived during the time when I was morphing from Barbarella into an activist, causing him so much angst. From the window he could look out onto his beloved vegetable garden. Shirlee was away on an errand, and I realized that I might not get another chance to tell him how I felt.

I sat at his feet and told him that I loved him very much; that although things had not always been good or easy between us, I knew he

had done his best to be a good father; that I loved him for it and was sorry for things I had done that had hurt him. I also told him how much I appreciated the way Shirlee looked after him—above and beyond the call of duty; all the nurses said they'd never seen a wife like her—and that no matter what, we would always consider her a part of our family and would keep her close. I don't remember him saying anything, but he began to cry. I didn't know if it meant he was moved because I had spoken of love and forgiveness or if my words showed him that I knew he was dying and that perhaps this was the first time anyone had said these closure words to him.

There is a saying that we all repeat often to explain our family members' readiness to tear up over silly things: "Fondas cry at a good steak." It's one thing to get teary over a good steak and another to weep from the depths of your heart—that display of emotion was what my father always hated, because he felt it showed weakness. Except for when Roosevelt died, I had not seen him cry from that deep place, and I hurt for him and was scared of this display of his pain and sadness. I stayed for a while in an effort to comfort him but then had to leave because I could sense that he hated to be crying in front of me. Shirlee told me that when she got home a little later she found him still in the chair, sobbing.

Then one morning Shirlee called me to come quickly to the hospital. I prayed I would get there while he was still alive, but he had died three minutes before. It doesn't matter how long a loved one has been near death, when it finally comes you never feel prepared. I wanted to sit by his bed and look at him for a long time. I *needed* to look at what there was, now that his soul had left, and to think about that. I needed closure. But the nurse officiously asked us all to leave the room so they could clean him up.

I went home and picked up Tom and the kids and we all drove to Dad's house to be with Shirlee. The press was already gathered outside their Bel-Air driveway, interviewing friends as they came to pay their respects. Slowly they gathered: Jimmy Stewart, Eva Marie Saint, Mel Ferrer, Dad's very first leading lady from Omaha, Dorothy McGuire, Joel Grey, James Garner, Lucille Ball, Barbara Stanwyck. My brother and his wife, Becky, came, with his daughter, Bridget, and son, Justin.

That first afternoon, when the house was crowded and everyone was in deep shock trying to wrap their minds around the reality that he was gone from us, I remember sitting in the study across from Jimmy



Stewart. On his way in he had told the press, "I've just lost my best friend." He had been sitting across from me with his head hanging down for several hours, without saying a word, when a movement from his direction caught my attention. Jimmy was lifting his arms up over his head and it dawned on me that he was remembering the kite that he and my dad had once made together, and he was trying to describe its enormity. I remembered Dad telling us the story of this kite when he and Jimmy were in their late twenties in California. Jimmy didn't seem to be talking to anyone in particular; he wasn't even paying attention to see if anyone was listening. He was just totally wrapped up in his memory: "It was so big . . . this big"—his arms went higher and his hands wider—"and . . . and"—Jimmy was always a stammerer—"when it caught the wind, it pulled me off the ground." He smiled. Then his arms came down and he was again silent. Those of us in the room looked at one another, understanding what a unique and deep loss this was for Jimmy. He seemed to enjoy it when I got him to reminisce about the days in New York during the Depression when the two of them had lived on rice.

I sat for a while next to the man who had been Dad's makeup artist for many years. He told me how much Dad talked about me, worried about me. "You can't imagine how much he talked about you."

Funny, I thought, how Dad talked to others *about* me but never directly to me, unless there was a problem. And I wondered if maybe I wasn't guilty of this with regard to my own children.

Not having been able to mourn my mother's death, and never again wanting to have internal tears that can't come out, I made a conscious decision that I would allow myself to experience fully Dad's passing. I moved into the house with Shirlee and did not leave for a week. For days people kept coming by to pay their respects. We'd sit together and watch his eulogies on television—all week they went on. It hit me that this wasn't just my loss, the family's loss. It was a national loss. Dad was a public figure, a hero, who didn't belong just to us. Dad lived out these quintessential American values. He represented things that we all want to be and that the *country* wanted to be. He often said he was attracted to certain kinds of roles—the working poor, powerless people, and the men who helped them get some power for themselves—because somehow their characters might rub off on him and he would become a better person. But now I saw that there had been a dialectic; he *did* have many of those qualities.



*The faces of my father that I loved: center is Norman Thayer, clockwise from bottom left: Abraham Lincoln, Tom Ioad, Gil Carter (Ox-Bow Incident), Mr. Roberts, Juror #8 (12 Angry Men), Clarence Darrow. (Photofest)*

One of the things I learned during that time was how courtesies matter. I had often not written to people I knew when they had lost a loved one, because I didn't really know what to say. Now I was seeing that just getting a letter, whether articulate or not, matters; it lets you know that the person is mourning with you, countenancing your pain. There were two letters especially important to me; one was from Carl Dean, Dolly Parton's husband, who wrote movingly of his admiration for my father; the other was from Gary Cooper's daughter, Maria, who spoke of the complexities of dealing with the loss of a father who was also a national hero.

I spent a lot of time in Dad's garden during those days of mourning, sitting under one of his fruit trees sorting out my feelings. While I still had a long way to go, in hindsight I see that this was a first step in my learning to be still, to *be* and not to *do*. I was grateful for having had *On Golden Pond* with him and that I'd managed to tell him I loved him before it was too late. I could feel myself making peace with the fact that though he hadn't given me all I had needed from him, he'd given me plenty. I somehow sensed that now that he was gone, some part of me would be able to come into its own, though I couldn't quite put my finger on what it would be. I was sad that at his request there would be no memorial service, that he would be cremated but never buried. I like graves, always have. They give a tangible presence to the spiritual realm. I knew that there would be times when having a gravestone to sit by and touch would make it easier to remember and communicate with him. But it wasn't my decision to make. This was when I decided I wanted to be buried with a gravestone, where my kids and grandkids could come and lay down their heads.

I don't think we can fully live until we have come to terms with our mortality. My friend Fred Branfman calls it "life-affirming death awareness." There's something far worse than death, I think, and that is to not really *live*.

I learned from watching Dad die that it is not death I fear as much as it is dying with unresolved regrets about things not done. This realization is determining how I am living my third act. If I want Vanessa to have sweet dreams, I have to work on that now, and I am. If I want to leave my family stronger for my having lived, that is also something I have to work on—now.

It is possible that the words I quoted at the start of this chapter, spo-

ken by my father in *The Grapes of Wrath*, are what determined early on my feelings about an afterlife. Flesh and bone are temporal, but I believe that our souls, the twenty-one grams of weight we are said to lose the moment we die, become part of the "one big soul that belongs to everybody." Our energy is born into the future, in the bodies of our children and loved ones. I have felt it. My father has come to me in dreams, stepping out from behind a bush, radiantly happy, to tell me not to worry about him. I see him in Vanessa's talent at composting and growing things. I have watched Troy onstage turn and say a line with a certain inflection, and I realize it is my father—yet Dad died when Troy was a little boy. I see it in the commitment my children and I have to justice. In these ways my father lives on.

## MAKING MOVIES

In most films there is a scene when the main character is going through a critical transition or defining event. Whether or not the story works often depends on the success of that scene. Sometimes the director will want to shoot it in one long take, with the camera following you as you move from place to place, hitting your marks, all the while making the emotional transitions. This delicate balance between technical and emotional demands is the hallmark of movie acting.

I would usually wake up the morning of the critical scene feeling queasy, with a knot in my belly. I'd arrive at the studio for makeup and hair, and at some point I'd be asked to stop what I was doing and come to the set for rehearsal. *Should I give it my all?* There is the risk that if I do, I won't have anything left when the real time comes (as was the case in my big scene in *On Golden Pond*). On the other hand, the purpose of rehearsal is to discover what my moves will be so that the lights can be set and the camera will know where to follow me; and if I don't dip fairly deep into the emotional waters during rehearsal, how will I know where I'm apt to go? So I rehearse and pray that I've given just enough, but not too much.

Rehearsal now over, I go back to my trailer to finish hair and makeup and then wait while the crew lights the set and practices camera moves with my stand-in. It can be a thirty-minute wait or an hour or, if it's a complicated setup, three hours. What to do? Do I read a book or get into a conversation that might risk taking me too far away from where my emotions are meant to be? Do I just sit here and think about the scene and risk getting too much into my head? The challenge is knowing myself well enough to calibrate correctly the balance between physical relaxation and emotional alertness that will most benefit me during the one- to three-hour wait. But it's hard not to feel like a balloon from which air is slowly leaking.

Then the moment comes. The knock on the door: "We're ready, Miss Fonda." Truthfully some small part of me (which I would try to ignore) has hoped that the sound stage would catch fire or the director would have a breakdown so that this moment could be postponed—for a year, maybe. But, no, there's the knock. No going back now. So I step out of my trailer and begin the endless walk to where everyone is waiting, all one hundred people who work on a film on any given day. As I run the gauntlet, the issue of my salary comes to mind. *Why didn't I agree to do the damn thing for free? I know there are people on the set who are just wait-*

*A lawyer and the doctor practice their callings. The plumber and the carpenter know what they will be called upon to do. They do not have to spin their work out of themselves, discover its laws, and then present themselves turned inside out to the public gaze.*

—ANNE TRUITT,

*Daybook, the Journal of an Artist*

*Grandma, what a great job you have!  
You get paid for using your imagination.*

—JOHN R. SEYDEL,

my eleven-year-old stepgrandson

PLAYING DRUNK had always frightened me. If there was even a short scene in a movie where I had to be tipsy, I dreaded it. That's why I decided to do *The Morning After*, a murder mystery about a heavy drinker who blacks out and finds a dead body in her bed. For that role I had to be perpetually drunk. Well, I thought, at this stage in my life why not try to do the things I fear the most? Mustn't get soggy. Besides, we got Sidney Lumet to direct and the superb Jeff Bridges to co-star. Bruce produced *The Morning After*, and the associate producer was Lois Bonfiglio, who would soon become my new partner.

As I write this I realize that I've done a good deal of thinking about acting in the fifteen-year hiatus I have taken, and I'd like to try to give you a sense of what it's like, at least for me.



ing to see if I'm worth all that dough, like that guy over there on the ladder reading the Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue. I remember being told that shooting on an average Hollywood film costs in the neighborhood of \$100,000 a day. If this goes badly, maybe I can offer to deduct it from my salary; otherwise I may never get hired again. Please let me stay relaxed, help me stay in my truth, tell my muse to be with me now. I arrive on the set that just a short while ago during rehearsal was a place of forgiving shadows. Now it's a pitiless glare of light under which my possible disintegration will be exposed for all to see. *Breathe deeply, Jane. Get out of your head and into your body . . . quiet the demon voice that is trying to tell you that today is the day you'll be exposed as an overpaid fraud.*

This is the part of film acting that I was only too happy to leave behind, the part that became more agonizing as time went on. Yet you have to go through those terrifying times if you are ever to have the magic ones, the times when it all works—and to be truthful, those I have missed. There were perhaps only eight or nine of them out of forty-five films, but they were the times when I stepped into my light and my muse was with me, all my channels were open, the creative flow coursed through my body, and I *became*. Whether the scene was sad or funny, tragic or triumphant, never mattered. When it worked it was like being enveloped in love and light, as I danced the intricate dance between technique and emotion, fully inside the scene while simultaneously a separate part of me observed and enjoyed the unfolding.

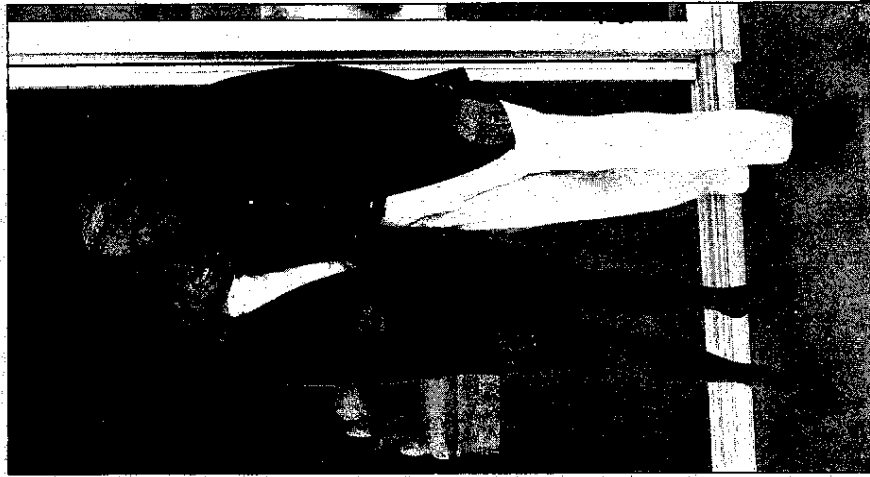
Ah, but just because it has happened once doesn't mean it will again! Each time is starting new, raw; it's a crapshoot—you just never know. Which is why this profession is so great for the heart—and so hard on the nerves.

I always assumed that the more you did something the easier it would get, but in the case of my career I found the opposite to be true. Every year the work seemed to get harder and my fear more paralyzing. Once, on the set of *Old Gringo*, I watched Gregory Peck late in his career doing a long, very difficult scene over and over again all day long. I saw that he too was scared. I went up to him afterward and hugged him and told him how beautiful and transparent he had been.

"But, Greg," I asked, "why do we do this to ourselves? Especially you. You've had a long and incredible career. You could easily retire. Why are you still willing to be scared?"

Greg sat for a moment, rubbing his chin. Then he said, "Well, Jane,

At the Cannes Film Festival  
for *Old Gringo* with  
Gregory Peck.



With Kris Kristofferson in *Rollover*.  
(Photofest)



maybe it's like my friend Walter Matthau says. His biggest thrill in life is to be gambling and losing a bit more than he can afford and then have one chance to win it all back. That's what you live for—that moment. The crapshoot. If it's easy, what's the point?"

Looking back, I sometimes think I enjoyed the story meetings more than the acting. With acting you're on your own; with script meetings you're part of a group. I never liked being number one. Co-number one worked for me; but when the burden of creativity rested exclusively on my shoulders, I would freeze—and echoes of the doors of creativity clanging shut were almost audible. What I like best is working with a group of people who share a vision and are able to set aside their egos—people you trust, who respect one another. I hated it when I thought that just because I was the star people were kowtowing, telling me my ideas were good even if they weren't. With Bruce, and later with Lois Bonfiglio and most of the writers and directors we worked with, I felt free to express an idea, knowing that if it wasn't good, they would let me know and we'd move on. I remember exhilarating script meetings when one person would have an idea, and that in turn would stimulate another idea from someone else, and *that* might lead to a sudden breakthrough in a scene, with everyone having placed a building block in the process but with no one having an overweening ego stake in any of it; it was the final product that mattered. I would have missed this sort of creative collaboration, except that I have found it in my life as an activist.

Actually it's not unusual for actors to suffer from self-doubt. Our profession feeds insecurity. Success and fame can come so fast and in this business can go just as fast. It takes stability and maturity to handle it. It's not like most other professions, where you go to college and then medical school, for instance, then years of internship—and at the end you're a doctor and no one can take those years away from you. There is no license or diploma that certifies that you are a for-real actor with the talent to bring a character to life. If you make it as an actor, suddenly there you are—and you don't exactly know why; why you and not her?

I tried never to get too used to the perks because I knew they might not last. But it was hard because the perks are addictive. There's the comfort of knowing that when you wake up you will roll into a waiting car and be driven to a predetermined place. Then you go into a trailer or

a dressing room where someone puts on your makeup, someone else does your hair, and yet a third person lays out the clothes you are to wear that day. You don't have to make any choices. Your *identity* is all taken care of, what you're supposed to think, feel, and say that day are determined by the pages you are given, and your only responsibility is to bring them to life (that's the hard part—the part you're paid for). At the day's end you take it all off, get driven back home, and are usually forgiven for being so tired that you collapse into bed—only to do it all again the next day.

For three months you are absolved of all responsibility except to bring your character alive. But then suddenly the shooting ends and it's *Who am I? Oh God, I have to start making decisions*. It's like morphing backward, like a film running in reverse. We step outside the circle of light and move from whoever we have temporarily become into the shadowy persona of who we were *before*—the "real" us, the one who has dogs that crap on the floor, kids that let her know her time-out is over and that she'd better show up for them and make up for lost time, and has a husband who doesn't say it but leaks resentment at her exciting absences. It's hard; at least it was for me. I was always an emotional noodle after a film, feeling as if I needed a halfway house where I could exhale all the accumulated *stuff* from three months of living in a protective bubble. But there is no such place if you have a family. You *have* to try to reconnect with husband and kids and pick up life where you left off: straightening up, doing laundry, driving kids to school, sitting in the bleachers watching Little League games with other moms, buying the groceries—the mechanical stuff. After a while the normalcy of the daily routine itself would get me back on track. Routine is what I cling to when the abyss beckons. But the pendulum swing from fantasy to everyday reality is dizzying, and it takes a healthy, grounded spirit to do it well.

In 1980 Tom launched a fierce, expensive two-year campaign for the California State Assembly. My last film before I took a hiatus to work on the campaign and grow the Workout business was *Rollover*, another project that Bruce and I undertook together. Inspired by the book *The Crash of '79*, the story told of secret financial manipulations between an American banker and the Saudis, ending with the collapse of the U.S.

economy. The late seventies, when we began to develop the script, was a time when the price of Arab oil was so high, the OPEC alliance so powerful, and our dependence on Saudi oil so great that economic blackmail—moving oil overnight from a dollar-denominated commodity to a gold-denominated commodity—was a possibility. We wanted to call attention to the perils of U.S. dependency on Arab oil, and it dovetailed with our organizational work to shift America's sources of energy to alternatives like solar and wind. With 9 to 5 we had cloaked the tough issues that office workers faced in comedy's softening mantle; with *Coming Home* we used a love story; *The China Syndrome* was a thriller; and *Rollover* was a combination murder mystery/love story. It was my third film with director Alan Pakula. My co-star was the chiseled, gravel-voiced actor/singer/songwriter Kris Kristofferson. I have to chuckle at the thought that Kris and I played important figures in the world of high finance. I can barely read a profit-and-loss statement, and Kris . . . well, let's just say that a man who hitchhiked across the country in the 1960s with Janis Joplin and wrote "freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose" is not by nature someone who wants to cozy up to mezzanine financing or interest rate swaps. An interesting, complicated man, Kris—a onetime Rhodes Scholar who worked on an oil rig off the coast of Texas, who cares deeply about injustice, and who captured angst the way few other songwriters ever have. It was fun working with someone who, like me, had a life beyond movies.

This was when Nathalie Vadim came back into my life. She was working as a script supervisor in Paris, but I sensed that she needed a change of scenery so I arranged for her to work on *Rollover* as the third assistant director. By then Nathalie was twenty-one years old, lean and lanky, with an appealing, gamelike beauty; she took to her new job with a professionalism and presence that impressed everyone. The assistant director liked her so much that he hired her for many of his subsequent films and she quickly moved up to second assistant and for the next ten years had a solid career in Hollywood.

In 1982 Tom won his election for the California State Assembly with a healthy nine-point margin. He served his district with integrity for seventeen years—working on behalf of working women and mothers, for child care, workplace safety, and affordable housing; against pollution; to improve the public education system. He spearheaded the Proposition 65 campaign to keep toxins out of California's drinking water, and I as-

sembled busloads of celebrity warriors who helped with the tough but ultimately successful battle. Prop 65 continues today as a substantial safeguard for Californians.

With the campaign over, I returned to acting in a role that is one of my favorites: Gertie Nevels, in *The Dollmaker*; the one Dolly Parton helped me prepare for. If you think of emotions as muscles, then approaching a new role is like entering a new sport: You bring to it the muscles you use habitually. *Anger? Oh yeah, I know what that muscle feels like—but not everyone expresses anger the same way. The truth is, all during the eleven years Bruce and I fought to bring *The Dollmaker* to life there was a small, scared part of me that hoped it wouldn't happen, because I doubted I had the right muscles to inhabit her. What would Gertie's anger look like? If you are lucky enough to have a good director, he or she gets you to shift to a new set of "anger" muscles, often ones you didn't know you had. It feels awkward at first; you get sore, but then you fall into it as if it's what you've always done.*

For me *The Dollmaker* is an archetypal fable that tells of Gertie, her husband, and their five children as they live a hard but value-rich life on a farm in the Appalachian Mountains of Kentucky, where her husband works in the coal mine. In contrast with the fundamentalist, fire-and-brimstone fear-based Christianity of her mother (played by Geraldine Page), Gertie sees Christ as a joyous, forgiving, laughing figure. She wants to carve his laughing face into a block of cherrywood. The family is uprooted when the mines close and is forced to move to the squalid, consumer-driven, buy-on-credit world of wartime Detroit, where men like her husband hope to find jobs in the factories. In the tacky workers' housing, in the shadow of a steel mill, Gertie finds consolation carving her Jesus on the block of cherrywood.

We developed *The Dollmaker* for television, and I was fascinated by the differences between film and television. For one thing television is a writer's medium, whereas film is a director's medium. With film you sit in a darkened theater with nothing else going on, looking up at the huge screen, moved as much by evocative images and camera angles as by the words. Often in films the essence of the story is conveyed visually. Television, on the other hand, is a cozy medium. You're at home in your living room or in bed, looking at a little box, far less aware of the visual impact



than you are the dialogue. This is why, often in television, the writers are also the producers—and have more power than they do in movies. And since with television you don't have to wait for just the right cloud formation or the perfect lighting effect to fill a huge screen, a TV movie can be shot in a matter of weeks, whereas a feature film usually takes three months. This came as a shock to me when we began shooting *The Dollmaker*. Scenes I had imagined and labored over for years—like the opening, where Gertie, riding a mule and carrying her ill infant son, stops a car and performs a tracheotomy on him in the glare of the car's headlights on the side of the road—would take a week to complete in a film. We shot it in a day!

This didn't keep *The Dollmaker* from being one of the most joyous acting experiences of my career. Our director—the nurturing, supportive, sensitive Dan Petrie—hovered like an angel over it all.

Petrie once told a film class of his that after my last shot he turned to me and said, "Well, Miss Fonda, it's a wrap," and I broke down and sobbed for a long time while he held me.

"I tried to analyze later why those tears," Dan told the class. "Why racking sobs? It was because of the death of the character, of somebody that she had invested so much time in and lavished so much love on." Yes, I had tapped into the Gertie part of me and it was hard to let go. I loved her so.

I think most of us have many personas inside us at the outset, but over time we lean to the one that is dominant and the others atrophy for lack of use. The difference with actors is that we are paid to *become* all the people inside us and to bring *into* us all the people we may have met along the way. Thus we remain instinctively aware of, unsettled by, curious about, empathetic toward, and eager to display all those potential beings we carry. Of all these, the empathy part is the most important and is, I believe, why actors—the good ones—tend to be open, progressive creatures: We are asked to get inside the skin of "other," to feel with "other," to understand "other." Being able to see from this "other" point of view gives actors compassion. Is that why artists have little tolerance for dictators, even those disguised as patriots? Because dictators abhor the variables in human nature, the very things artists cherish.

*The Dollmaker* aired on ABC on Mother's Day 1984, and I learned something else about television that day: I knew exactly what time my film would show, and as the time approached I found myself wanting to



The star-studded Clean Water Caravan in support of Proposition 65, with Dweezil Zappa, Linda Gray, Bobby Walden, Victoria Principal, Ed Begley, Jr., Joanna Kerns, Patricia Duff, LeVar Burton, Charlie Haid, Tyne Daly, Georg Stanford Brown, Troy, Moon Zappa, Bonnie Bedella, Shari Belafonte, Linda Evans, Daphne Zuniga, among others. (© 1986 Michael Jacobs/MJP)



As Gerie Nevels in *The Dollmaker*. (© Steve Schapiro)

go up to everyone I saw on the street and say, "What are you doing? You should be going home to watch this movie." Lots of people did see it, and for many it is their favorite of my films. I won an Emmy for it.

By the mid-eighties Tom was in the state legislature and I was in emotional limbo, plowing through life by sheer force of will (of which I have an abundance), but willpower can be anathema to creativity. Creativity requires a looseness, a letting go, an openness that allows the psyche to plumb the moist depths where the stuff of dreams and myths percolate. On the other hand, the I-will-get-that-done-I-will-remain-married-I-will-be-perfect-I-will-not-express-my-needs mode of living means existing in a contracted body with shallow breath and nothing to nourish the spirit—"No wild and unheard-of melodies / No tunes that rise from the blood / no blood calling from the deep places," as poet Rainer Maria Rilke put it.

Without "blood calling from the deep places," my work that followed *The Dollmaker*—*Agnes of God*, *The Morning After*, *Old Gringo*, and finally *Stanley and Iris*—became harder and harder, although there were moments in all of them that I cherish.

I just didn't want to be doing it anymore. It was too agonizing. I was experiencing creative disintegration, and I didn't understand that my inability to be honest about the disintegration of my long marriage, the shutting down of my body, and my feeling totally responsible for it all was slowly draining me of life. I remember sitting in my hotel room in Toronto, where I was making *Stanley and Iris*, and thinking, What will I do with my life? What is there for me? I saw only a joyless road ahead, and I couldn't admit that it was because there was no future in the marriage. It was inconceivable to me that my couplehood with Tom wasn't going to be forever. Leaving would be a sign of defeat, and defeat was not an option. Besides, without Tom what would I be?

He asked, "Do you love me?" and when I answered, "Yes," he asked me to write him a letter telling why. Once I'd finished the part about his being a wonderful father, I got stuck. Why couldn't I think of reasons for loving him? Why did my hand want to write only the anger?

My wonderful, loyal, always intelligent body kept desperately sending me signals by repeatedly attracting mishaps the way abandoned bodies do: *Pay attention to me, listen to me*. This hadn't happened to me since

Jimmy Smits,  
Gregory Peck, and me  
in *Old Gringo*.  
(Mary Ellen Mark)



With director Sidney  
Lumet on the set of  
*The Morning After*.

my injury-prone days in Greenwich when my mother and father's marriage was delaminating. When I ignored my body's signals I was paid back in broken bones: fingers, ribs, feet. On his desk Tom kept a photo of me that he'd taken when I broke my collarbone. When I broke my nose in a biking spill during the filming of *Stanley and Iris* he wanted a photo of that as well. Maybe he liked me better broken.

I was broken—sexless and fallow. I think it is when people have lost touch with their spirit, their life force, that they become most vulnerable to consumer culture and the toxic drive for perfection. Instead of dealing with my crisis in a real way, I got breast implants. I am ashamed of this, but I understand why I did it at the time. I somehow believed that if I *looked* more womanly, I would *become* more womanly. So much of my life had become a façade; what did it matter if I added my body to the list of falsehoods?

It was for *me* that I did it. In fairness, Tom was adamantly opposed. Here was the woman who had once impressed him by crying in empathy for the Vietnamese women who had mutilated their bodies to conform to a *Playboy* image of femininity and now she was doing the same thing to herself. I knew when I did it that I was betraying myself, but my self had shrunk to the size of a thimble.



With Robert De Niro in *Stanley and Iris*.  
(© Steve Schapiro)



# THE GIFT OF PAIN

friend Paula offered me a massage but I fled from the table, unable to stand being touched, unworthy of pleasure. I had been nothing'd.

Given what I have written about the deterioration of our marriage and our lack of communication, you may be wondering why Tom's blurted admission affected me so deeply. It opened some old, primal rupture, exposing me to an onslaught of pain and grief that went way beyond the end of a troubled marriage.

I don't think Tom expected it to be the end. I think he believed, as did others, that I had known all along of his infidelities and didn't really mind. Maybe some part of me *did* know. Maybe that's why anger would well up when we made love.

I felt overwhelming shame. I didn't tell anyone for several weeks, not even Paula. When I finally did tell her, she took me in. For more than a week I lived with her and her husband, Mark Rosenberg, in their house on Wadsworth Avenue, right down from where Tom and I had spent over ten years. I didn't have the strength to ask Tom to move out.

When I finally did decide to call it quits months later, I went back to my house, gathered all of Tom's belongings into large plastic bags, and threw them out the window into the garden. That helped . . . a little.

But not much. This was so new for me. I had always been the strong one, the Lone Ranger, never blindsided by a pain so profound that my customary arsenal of self-protection was rendered inoperable. The terrain was so unfamiliar that I was unhinged from all my moorings. I would set out for the market and have to pull off the road because my body would be so racked with sobs that I couldn't drive. I would step outside and wonder why the sun was shining, astonished by this undeniable proof of nature's indifference. The robin's-egg-blue sky, unchanged from yesterday, gave an acute sense of permanence to the idea of going forward alone. Death loomed so vividly that I remember insisting it be stipulated in my divorce settlement that Tom not be allowed to speak at my funeral. (I was convinced that he would opportunistically try to do so and couldn't imagine that we would ever again be close enough friends to justify it.)

It wasn't *him* I missed as much as an amorphous *us*, the "usness" that celebrated every Easter at the ranch with two hundred of our friends, me dressed up as the Easter bunny, the egg hunts, hay rides, hymn singing, and square dancing; the "usness" that went to Dodgers games with Troy and his buddies from Little League; the "usness" that

*No phoenix can arise from no ashes.*

—MARION WOODMAN,  
*Leaving My Father's House*

ON THE NIGHT I turned fifty-one Tom announced to me that he was in love with another woman.

The bottom dropped out of life with a devastation so abrupt and severe that my very existence appeared as a foreign landscape. I felt as though I had just learned I was adopted. Oddly enough I hadn't seen it coming.

It happened during Christmas 1988. We were all in Aspen, Colorado: Troy, Vanessa, Lulu, Nathalie, Tom, and me, sharing a small rented condo. I didn't want to spoil everyone's vacation, so I said nothing—stiff upper lip and all that. So as not to let on there was trouble, I'd wait till everyone had gone to bed and then I'd lie on the living room couch alternately sobbing and reading a novel by Amos Oz.

Never in my life could I have imagined surviving such emotional pain or known that it would assume an *actual physical presence*. I felt blood oozing through the pores of my skin; the pain of a dagger being turned in my heart that now weighed a hundred pounds—allowing me for the first time to understand the meaning of "heavy heart." I was unable to speak above a whisper for almost a month, or to move swiftly or to swallow food. My throat closed in on itself. Back in Los Angeles, my

had, I felt, helped end the war. Usness was gone. And I was fifty-one years old.

Later I realized that both Troy and Vanessa had known the marriage was troubled; but if Tom and I were unable to talk to each other about what was happening, we certainly weren't able to talk to the children, and they didn't feel able to initiate the discussion. Vanessa would try to open a dialogue through her anger, but when she did I would shut down. Troy was fifteen and Vanessa twenty when we told them we were separating.

Vanessa was in Africa, working together with Nathalie on a television movie that Vadim was directing. She was acting as language coach, still photographer, and assistant director. I wasn't sure what to do. I was unaccustomed to reaching out and asking for help. I didn't want to burden her or disrupt her work, and I also felt so ashamed. Here I'd gone and failed again. But as soon as I told Paula what had happened, she said, "You have to call Vanessa right away. She absolutely needs to know." Her saying this allowed me to acknowledge how desperately I needed Vanessa with me. Within days she was home, and this meant more to me than she will ever know.

Vanessa had never particularly liked Tom—or rather she didn't like what she saw me becoming with Tom: giving up myself to suit him (they have subsequently become good friends). Confronted with my sadness, however, I remember her saying (mostly to herself), "Be careful what you wish for." It was her way of expressing both her own long held hopes that I would leave him and her empathy for me.

She also said, "Maybe now you can spend more time with your women friends who Tom chased away."

"He did?" I asked, wanting now to know truths that I'd not been able to receive before.

"Mom," Vanessa said, rolling her eyes heavenward in disdain at my inability to see what everyone knew. "Lois, Julie, Paula—why do you think they haven't come around much? Tom doesn't like them and they know it. He was always putting you down, too, but *you* didn't know it."

Tom moved to Santa Monica into a rented apartment with a room for Troy, and that's where Troy mostly stayed. This struck terror in my heart: Was he choosing Tom over me? Was I going to lose my son? But today he explains his decision: "I could see that Dad needed me more than you did. He was in bad shape." He was right.

I remember asking a friend what I should say to Troy about the breakup and being told, "Say what you feel."

*Say what I feel!* If nothing else, I knew I couldn't do that. Think of every angry, damning, never-to-be-forgotten word you could call somebody you wanted to murder, and that will give you some idea of what I felt. I couldn't foist that onto my son. A small voice inside was telling me that when the roller-coaster ride was over, my anger would subside and I'd see it was for the best and be grateful that Tom had been the catalyst to end it (which is what happened, but it took two years). I spent a lot of time thinking how awful it is for children to become the battleground between warring ex-spouses and how much self-control and maturity it takes to keep a lid on things. Yet I didn't want to do what my parents had done and what I'd done with Nathalie when I left her father—not show emotion, not encourage a discussion of what was happening that would create a space for them to express their feelings. The trick was to try to do it without anger. Sadness, yes, but not anger.

So I allowed Troy and Vanessa to see me cry, but at the same time I made sure to let them know that a split was a two-way street and that I was partly to blame, which I knew to be true. I talked to them about the primary lesson I was learning from it all: the need to communicate, to recognize feelings, and to express them. Tom and I really didn't let each other know what we were feeling. Maybe he didn't try hard enough, or maybe I didn't try hard enough or didn't want to hear, or maybe the marriage was meant to be resonant only for a certain period of time (it was—for seven years) and unintentionally we were both looking for ways out.

The comedy *The Seven Year Itch* was onto something, and it's about much more than sex. According to science, all our cells change every seven years. The Bible is also full of significant sevens ("*On the seventh day . . .*"). And it seems that people go through major psychic transitions every seven or so years and therein lies the rub: What if a couple's transitions don't mesh? That's when choices have to be made: We can part, we can remain together on different wavelengths and do our best, or we can try to understand each other's transitions and work to make them compatible. Tom's and my wavelengths had grown too distant. After sixteen years, not knowing how to make our differences compatible, we parted.

My friends told me to stay busy. I knew that was wrong for me. Busy was what I'd been—busy and inside my own head. Now for the first time I was in a situation where *who* I was and *how* I was used to functioning were no longer valid. Therefore I had to allow everything to reorganize, not on a cognitive level (since I was, quite literally, out of my mind) but somatically, on a cellular level. For this to happen, I knew unconsciously that I needed to be very still and allow myself to witness what was happening and *feel* it.

I surrounded myself with loving women friends and classical music. My home became a haven. I knew that I needed all the endorphins my body could muster, so I forced myself to keep working out and took marathon bike rides and hikes with women friends.

Through the pain I could tell that something new was happening to me. Trauma was creating an opening in my psyche. I needed to pay attention, to be ready to step through and descend into it, whatever it was. It felt archetypal. Something in me was being slain in the fires of pain so that some new thing could be born. I knew it and went with it, and in the alchemy of my pain, like flowers whose seeds open only in the presence of fire, tendrils of something new began to sprout. Pain for me was a Trojan horse, penetrating the protective walls I'd erected around my heart, bearing within it hints of a future I might never have awakened to had I tried to numb myself with busyness.

One day I heard myself say out loud, "If God wanted me to suffer like this, there must be a reason." God? I looked around. *Did I just say God?* Never had such a thought come into my head. I'm an atheist, right? But the moment I said it, the texture of my pain changed ever so slightly. It became easier to be patient, giving myself over to . . . what? I didn't know, but I was so weakened that it was easy to let myself go limp and just *be*.

Ever so slowly, over the months, a membrane began to cover the heart wound, and I could tentatively begin to cross the abyss without falling in. In psychologist Marion Woodman's *Leaving My Father's House* I read: "When humans suffer they are vulnerable. Within this vulnerability lives the humility that allows flesh to soften into the sounds of the soul." Maybe this was what was happening to me. I felt lighter, as if a space had been cleared around me allowing coincidences (God's way of *remaining anonymous*) to manifest. Maybe these coincidences had been happening all along and I just hadn't been open to them. Now it was as though I were being led to them.

For example, there was the way I came to find a therapist. While Tom and I were still living in Ocean Park, at the end of our little street a house was torn down and rebuilt. This was the house that Paula and her husband, Mark, moved into. Then one day about two weeks after Tom and I split up, I was bike riding along the beach with Julie Lafond, and as we passed Wadsworth she pointed to that very house and said, "The therapist who saved my marriage owns that house and has her office in the basement."

Well, thought I, who was holding back from going into therapy because I worried I wouldn't find "the right one," *This may be a sign: I've just been staying there with my best friend, I saw it being built, it's on my old street, and the therapist who owns it saved my other friend's marriage. I called up that very afternoon and made an appointment.*

It was a fortuitous coincidence that led me to a female professional I would talk to once a week over the ensuing two years. She set me on a path of self-reflection and, after retiring, referred me to the therapist who would make a life-altering difference.

Then there was the psychic (hey, therapists, psychics—why not cover all bases?) who told me I would begin writing: "Writing and writing—and what you write will be important to women." That's when I began the journal writing that has helped with this book.

Over the following months, awash in what felt like miracles, surrounded by the love of my children and women friends, I could feel myself growing stronger. The sense of being led remained. The dark, empty space inside was beginning to fill with Spirit. I was entering my body, and I could feel a quickening.



# PHOENIX ON HOLD

*For everything there is a season  
And a time for every matter under heaven:  
A time to be born, and a time to die*

—ECCLESIASTES 3:1-2

IT WASN'T TIME YET. The ashes were there, the Phoenix was beginning to rise, the Spirit was beginning to fill me. But my ego wasn't strong enough yet to contain it. A large part of me still panicked at going forward without a man.

The day after my divorce was announced in the papers, the phone rang. Someone yelled, "Jane, there's a Ted Turner on the phone for you." Ted Turner? I'd met him once with Tom at a screening of a documentary about child abuse that his Turner Broadcasting System was going to run. He's probably calling to offer me a job, I thought as I picked up the phone.

Suddenly a voice boomed through the phone so loudly that I had to hold the receiver away from my ear.

"Is it true?"

"Is what true?" I thought it was an odd way to start a phone conversation with a virtual stranger.

"Are you and Hayden really getting a divorce?"

"Yes." I was still in the throes of depression and unable to speak above a whisper.

"Well then, would you like to go out with me?"

I was dumbstruck. Dating was the furthest thing from my mind. "To tell you the truth, I can't even think about dating right now. I can hardly even speak. I think I'm having an emotional breakdown. Why don't you call me back in three months?"

"Hey, I know just how you feel." I could tell he was trying to modulate his voice to approximate compassion and that this was hard for him. "I just broke up with my mistress," he went on. "I wrecked my whole family and my marriage two years ago to go and live with her, so now I'm having a hard time myself."

It occurred to me that this was just about the most inappropriate thing a man could say to a woman who had just been dumped by her husband of sixteen years for his mistress. Didn't it occur to him that it would be his wife I'd identify with, not him? *This is one strange guy*, I thought.

But what I said to him was, "Call back in three months, when I'm feeling better. Okay?" He said he would do that, and we hung up. Whatever would come of it, the call in and of itself made me feel better. So did calls from friends like Warren Beatty and Quincy Jones, who wanted to check in to see how I was doing.

"Chin up now, cuz," Quincy said lovingly. (He'd recently had his genealogy traced by the Mormons and it showed that we were distant cousins.) "Don't let yourself get too down now, cuz. This is your time to play, have fun."

Ted called back almost three months to the day. I'd all but forgotten about his promise and was surprised and flattered that he had remembered. I realized I didn't know enough about this man who would be my first date in seventeen years. I knew about CNN but had never watched it. I got my news from the papers and National Public Radio. Besides, this was pre-Tiananmen Square, pre-Gulf War days, and CNN was still referred to occasionally as "Chicken Noodle News." Nor was I familiar with the world of sailing and the fact that he'd won the prestigious America's Cup. So as time approached for the date, I hurried to find out everything I could.

It wasn't encouraging. Someone gave me an article about his life that revealed he probably had a drinking problem. Not what I needed—again. A friend of one of his children whom I happened to know told me he liked only younger women and if he was interested in me, it would

only be as a notch in his belt. Of course there were lots of positives as well: his environmentalism, his global vision, his work for peace. My brother, the sailor in the family, filled me in on *that* facet.

"Oh, sis, this is really exciting! He's the *real* Captain America" (unlike the bro, I guess, who had had a different take on Captain America in *Easy Rider*). "Ted won the America's Cup!" He couldn't believe I didn't know this and went on breathlessly to tell me the whole saga of the Bubba from the South who stormed into Newport, home of the blue-blazerred bluebloods, wearing an old engineer's cap: how at first nobody in the race took him seriously; and how he kicked their asses.

"You gotta understand—he's a hero!" Peter's voice gets high when he's excited. It was contagious. But as I said to my kids right before the date, "Don't worry, this is just a way to get my feet wet, practice how to do the dating thing again. This isn't going anywhere. Trust me."

Actually I had come down with a bad cold the day before the date but decided not to cancel on him, given how long he'd waited. When he called to get directions to my house, I told him I was sick and would have to make it an early evening. It didn't seem to faze him. But I was nervous! I'd gathered the clan around me for support: Peter, Nathalie, Troy, Vanessa, Lulu, and my assistant, Debbie Karolewski.

I may not have been invested in this date "going anywhere," but I wanted to be sure it wouldn't be because *he* didn't want it to. So I wore a very short black leather miniskirt, a tight black halter top, black hose, and spike black heels. A few studs and I could have passed for a dominatrix.

I remember being up in my room putting on last-minute touches when Ted arrived. I could hear when Peter opened the door and Ted burst through, his over-the-top voice booming out, "Hey, Montana! Gimme five!" Peter lives in Montana and, as I learned later, Ted had just bought a ranch there and was excited that they had this in common.

A few minutes later I came down the stairs and Ted swung around to watch me. "Wow," he said in a husky voice, devouring me like so much eye candy with an unabashed lust so palpable that I could feel it on my skin. I also saw he was nervous, and I found that endearing. He shouted good-bye to my family (they seemed subdued, as in the wake of a tornado), ushered me quickly out the door, and helped me into a hired sedan with a driver he introduced by name (which impressed me).

"I have friends who are Communists," he offered eagerly as soon as we were seated. He said it like a little boy bringing home good grades:



1984, with Vanessa.  
(© Suzanne Tenner)

"I've been to the Soviet Union several times because of the Goodwill Games. Gorbachev is my buddy and so is Castro. I've been to Cuba two times. We go hunting and fishing together."

I had to laugh. I didn't know if it was because he really thought I was a Communist and wanted to let me know that wouldn't stand between us or if he thought it was something I'd find endearing. I did. It was the second time in a matter of minutes that the word *endearing* had come to mind—not what I had been expecting. Before we'd even gotten to the restaurant, he pulled another stunner:

"I don't know much about you, see, so . . . ahhh . . . I got CNN to do a printout of your archives and I read through it. The stack was about a foot tall. So . . . ahhh . . . then I had them do a printout of my files and mine is about three feet tall." Pause. "Mine's bigger than yours! Pretty cute, huh?"

I was astonished—by his comparing our files, by his telling me about it, and by his favorable editorializing . . . *Pretty cute, huh?* All I could do was shake my head and laugh, telling him that I hadn't known much about him, either, and had done my own, far less extensive research. He was bowling me over and my whole body was abuzz.

"I need a driver when I'm out here," he explained, "'cause I don't know my way around even though I actually owned a Hollywood studio . . . did you know I bought MGM?"

"Yes," I replied. "I read that."

"But I didn't get to keep it for long. They ran me out of town in a barrel. I didn't even get to use the casting couch. Kept the library, though. I own thirty-five percent of the greatest movie classics of all time, and I'm colorizing 'em. Young people these days don't want to watch black-and-white movies. What's your position on colorizing?"

"I don't know. I haven't thought about it."

"Scorsese's against it. But, hey, women put on makeup and nobody gives a hoot. I think it's gonna bring in a whole new audience." During the brief pauses he seemed to Hoover me up with his eyes. It was hard keeping my breathing steady.

I had made a reservation at a small dark Italian restaurant in a neighborhood where I knew we would not run into reporters. As soon as we were seated I apologized for not feeling well, reminding him that I would

need to go home right after dinner, whereupon he excused himself, saying he had to use the john. I naturally assumed he was calling some Hollywood starlet to make a late date now that he knew he wouldn't be scoring with me.

As soon as he returned to the table he launched into a long speech about how he had been raised by his father to be a male chauvinist pig (his words); how his father always told him that women were like a bus ("If you missed one, another would always come along"); how his father drank a lot, had lots of women, and would come in late at night, wake up his young son, and recount the details of his evening's exploits.

"I just think you should know that . . . ahhh . . . well, from a feminist perspective you'd say I was a sexist because of how my father raised me. But my mistress, the one I just broke up with—"

"The blond pilot?" I interrupted, wanting to be sure we were on the same page mistresswise.

"Yeah, that one, J.J. She's . . . ahh . . . a feminist and she's helped me to see things differently. I was actually . . . ahhh . . . magn . . . ahhh . . . mong . . . ahhh . . . magnanimous with her."

"Are you trying to say 'monogamous'?" I asked, this time laughing for real. *Oh my God! He can't even get the word out of his mouth!*

Then he gave me a recap of his credentials, always punctuating his sentences with a drawn-out "ahhh"; how he was an environmentalist, how he'd gotten his network to pay for and broadcast all of Jacques Cousteau's documentaries and National Geographic's and Audubon's.

He told me that he had become an environmentalist growing up on his father's plantations in the South; how he'd had a pretty unhappy childhood, always moving; how every time he'd come home from school his father would have bought a new place in a new state.

"So I never had many permanent friends and I sort of found solace in nature. I was always outside and I notice things other people don't see. That's because I pay attention, and besides, I'm a hunter. Hunters are real environmentalists—they're the first ones to notice how things are changing. For instance, I noticed early on that there were fewer and fewer ducks migrating up and down the flyway every year. Are you against hunting?"

"No, but I've never done any."

"Hmmm. Well, the real problem is too many people . . . too many damn people. We have to stop people from having so many kids. I have



five myself, but that's because I didn't know better back then. Excuse me, I have to tighten my skates," he said, getting up to go to the bathroom again. It was a journey he'd make four more times during the dinner. Could he be having difficulty getting a late date? "Tighten his skates"? Yeah, sure! What'd he take me for, a fool?

I'm certain I must have said *something* during the dinner. Surely he asked me questions about myself (besides if I was opposed to hunting), but I don't recall anything coming from me, only what was coming at me in that boyish, irrepressible flood of information.

No sooner was he back at the table than with an involuntary sideways glance at my breasts, he asked, "Have you had . . ." and immediately stopped himself, flustered. "Never mind. It's . . . ahhh, nothing," he stammered, dropping his gaze to a neutral place on the tablecloth and arranging his face in an appropriate expression somewhere between contrition and gravity. I realized that he had been about to ask if I had breast implants (I chose not to satisfy his curiosity). What I didn't realize was that I had just witnessed a historic moment, perhaps the only such: Ted Turner had actually decided not to say what was on his mind. Not knowing this, I couldn't appreciate and be flattered by the Herculean effort at self-censorship it represented.

As he walked me to my door following dinner, he asked, "Can I hug you?" and when I nodded, he gave me a sweet, long hug. Then, as I opened the door, he said, "I'm smitten . . . Ahh . . . listen, can I call you tomorrow?" I nodded and disappeared into the house. Smitten. So was I.

He called first thing in the morning. "I didn't wake you up, did I?"

"No, I'm an early riser."

"Hey, that's terrific. Me too. That's a good sign. Listen, I really like you. Do you think you can come spend a weekend at my ranch in Montana?"

"I really like you, too, Ted, and I'd like to get to know you better. But . . . I'm . . . well, to be honest, I'm not ready to have an affair. And I have to assume you'd expect us to sleep together if I went up there for the weekend. I'm still kind of shaky. So, no. I don't think I should come." There was a brief silence on the other end—a first.

"Well, okay." He sounded like a Boy Scout. "We don't have to sleep together. I have an extra guest room where you can stay. I . . . ahhh . . . promise I won't touch you. Aw, come on. You'll love it. Heck, your brother lives in Montana. It's a great place."

"I know, I've been there many times."

"Well then, come on. We'll drive around and I'll show you all the critters. I've got elk and deer and eagles and . . ." He was relentless. Of course I caved.

"Okay. I'll come. But I can't until June, 'cause I'm going to the Cannes Film Festival with a film of mine and I'm real busy with promotions and stuff."

"No kidding? Well . . . but that's two weeks from now!"

"Yeah, that's right, but that's as good as I can do." He reluctantly agreed, and we set a date for early June.

Flying to Ted's Montana ranch, I had no idea what to expect. Would he fetch me in a chauffeured limousine? Would his be one of those marble-floored faux ranches with a huge staff? I needn't have worried. He was driving a small Jeep, and the ranch, when we finally got there over an hour later, was a very modest log cabin. Ted, I would learn, is frugal when it comes to spending money on personal comforts.

During the drive I couldn't help noticing that Ted was exceedingly agitated, and I asked him why. For you to understand why his answer appeared to me as a miraculous coincidence, I must give some backstory: Following in the footsteps of the Mel Gibson movies *The Road Warrior* and *Mad Max* had been other films that gave a dark, apocalyptic view of the future, and this had made me want to make a film that went against all these grim projections, one that showed what might happen if we avoided Armageddon and did things right. "People need to be able to envision what the world we're working for will look like," I had told my new producing partner, Lois Bonfiglio. I had actually begun researching it. So imagine my astonishment when in answer to my question about his agitation, Ted replied:

"I'm so excited about this idea I have. I've decided to launch a worldwide contest with a cash reward for the best story that gives a positive vision of the future. I'm going to call it the Turner Tomorrow Award."

"I don't believe this! I've had the same idea, Ted, only I've thought of doing it as a movie." I knew I was in a psychically susceptible state, but this seemed amazing. (Two years later the Turner prize was awarded to the now cult classic *Ishmael*. But no movie ever ensued, from either of us. By then I'd retired from filmmaking.)

Bouncing over rugged dirt roads, thirty minutes after entering his property, we finally arrived at the small house where we'd be staying. As soon as he'd put my suitcase in the (basement) guest room, Ted asked me to watch a videotaped speech he'd made at a recent National Abortion Rights Action League dinner defending a woman's right to reproductive choice.

No sooner was that over than he dropped dramatically on one knee and recited, "At the feet of Hannibal / Then like a ripe plum Rome once lay / Oft he put the time of conquest / To a later, better day." . . . I wrote that myself, in high school. Pretty strong, huh? I was a classics major at Brown. Thucydides? Have you read him? I know his *History of the Peloponnesian War* and everything about Alexander the Great. He was my hero until I switched from war to peace. Martin Luther King and Gandhi are my heroes now. . . . Whaddaya think, huh?"

"Pretty cute," I replied.

I may have descended the basement stairs alone that night, but I had a dizzying head full of Turner to take to bed with me—he'd made sure of that. Like one of those male birds in a nature documentary that puffs and struts and fans his plumage in a wild mating dance, Ted had, it seemed, decided to conquer me. His efforts were endearing.

The sun was barely up the next morning when he yelled down for me to get dressed so we could have breakfast and go for an early drive. "Do you mind making breakfast?"

"No, of course not," I answered, grateful to have something to do while acting as audience.

In the daylight I could see that we were situated at the bottom of a long, narrow valley surrounded by rocky cliffs. Sixteenmile Creek, the creator of the valley, meandered close by, looking far more riverlike than the word *creek* implied. I asked him how he had discovered this place, and over breakfast he recounted how the previous summer he had been a guest of a longtime friend at a ranch in Wyoming.

"I love fishing," he explained, "but it's been mostly bass. I'd never fished before and I really liked it, and when I saw the views . . ." Of course. This man from the piney flatlands of the South had encountered vistas to match his expansive vision. Before even leaving Wyoming, he had called his friend's real estate broker and the very next day he flew to Montana and purchased this "starter ranch," as I would later refer to it.

"At first I couldn't think of a good name for the place," Ted went on, "but I thought it was the best ranch bar none, so that's what I call it, the Bar None Ranch." The place has more than quadrupled in size since then, but at three thousand acres it was the largest piece of private property I'd ever visited as a guest. When singer Michael Jackson told me he had bought a two-thousand-acre spread near my ranch in California, I thought it was sinful—one person owning that much land. What to make, then, of this acquisitive man who already owned one of the barrier islands off the coast of South Carolina near Hilton Head, an old rice plantation in the same state, a quail-hunting plantation in north Florida, and a one-hundred-acre farm outside Atlanta?

After breakfast we took off in the Jeep, bouncing over miles of old logging roads that switchbacked from one pine-covered mountain to the next through breathtaking terrain. Elk and mule deer were everywhere, just as he'd promised. Even a black bear and a bald eagle managed to make an appearance, as if called up by Ted. At one point he leaned out the car window and pointed to a bird flying in silhouette high overhead. "See that?" he asked. "That's a ferruginous hawk." Another time it was a red-tailed hawk. I'd never known anyone who could recognize birds on the wing in silhouette. I was duly impressed.

"How can you tell?" I asked.

"By how their wings move. I know a lot about birds. I'm sort of an ornithologist. You know that songbirds are becoming extinct? You know there used to be so many passenger pigeons that the sky would be darkened when they flew over? There are none left. We wiped them all out. And squirrels used to be able to travel through treetops from the East Coast to the Mississippi River without ever touching ground. Can't do that now. The trees are gone." I was mesmerized, thinking how much I could learn from this man.

"I gotta stop for a second and tighten my skates." And with that he left the motor running, jumped out, and peed off the side of the road, his back barely turned.

In fact, nature called Mr. Turner every ten minutes or so. After several of these stops I had to laugh. "When you kept going to the bathroom during our dinner date," I confessed to him, "I had assumed you were arranging a late date with a starlet, but I see it was just paranoia on my part."

"Yep. When I'm nervous I have to pee a lot."

"Am I making you nervous?"

"Yeah. Like I said, I'm smitten with you." Then, realizing where we were, he abruptly stopped the jeep. "Come on, I want to show you something," he said excitedly as he hopped out and motioned for me to follow him. We climbed a small rise alongside the road and he pointed proudly to a shallow cave that ran vertically from the ground up the side of the cliff. I peered closer into its vaginal-like opening and saw it was a shiny, purplish vein of rock crystal.

"Pretty cute, huh? My very own crystal mine." He broke off a small crystal and handed it to me. "Here," he said, "a memento." Then suddenly he kissed me and I . . . well, I had a mini meltdown. Warm lips on my lips. Whew! Hadn't realized how much fervor was bottled up. We got back in the car and continued silently on our way. My heart was pounding.

It turned out that Ted didn't know the back roads of his ranch all that well, which wasn't surprising given how many there were. We got seriously lost. In a place like that, getting lost is an I-wonder-if-someone-will-find-our-bodies-months-from-now kind of experience. But the most memorable part of the drive was the conversation . . . well, "monologue" is a more appropriate word, with Ted all the while chewing and spitting Red Man tobacco juice into a small Styrofoam cup as he urged me to sit closer to him. "Come on, move over here. I want to feel you against me. Put your hand on my knee."

"Where did you grow up, Ted?" I asked.

"I lived in Cincinnati to begin with . . . a Yankee. I loved being outside collecting bugs and butterflies. I'm told my first word was *pretty*. I loved to draw, especially pictures of birds, animals, and boats, and I wrote poetry. My dad had a billboard business. He was a real conservative. He thought Roosevelt was a Commie."

"Roosevelt was my dad's hero. The only time I ever saw Dad cry was when Roosevelt died."

"Yeah . . . well . . . But still, you and I have a lot in common. My father killed himself when I was in my twenties—shot himself. Your mother committed suicide, too. Right?"

"Right."

"So see? That's probably why we're both overachievers." He told me that his father had suffered from depression and emphysema, had taken barbiturates, and had secretly sold his failing billboard company right before he took his life. "He was the one I wanted to prove myself to, and he wasn't there to see me make it," Ted said sadly. "He was something."

Women loved him and he loved them. Couldn't get enough. He thought it was a sign of true manhood to play around. He thought *mongo* . . .

"Monogamy?" I offered.

"Yeah, that's it. He thought that was for sissies." Ted went on to describe how when he'd come home from boarding school at age twelve, he was put to work on a labor crew erecting roadside billboards for his father's business. He earned \$50 a week and had to pay \$25 of that for room and board in his own house. His father told him that if he found a better deal, he could go somewhere else to live. Apparently Ed Turner was a dapper, theatrical, charismatic, heavy-drinking, womanizing manic-depressive who believed that sparing the rod would spoil the child. Judy Nye, who was married to Ted for two years when they were both in their early twenties, once said of Ed Turner, "He believed that insecurity bred greatness." Ted's aunt Lucy told me that even when Ted was an infant his father would pass by his crib and snap his fingers against his son's cheek. "Think about that," Lucy said, wanting me to understand why Ted was the way he was.

That day, as we drove through his ranch, Ted talked with utter dispassion about the beatings he had taken from his father, all the while assuring me that his father loved him and was his best friend. He spoke of the belts and straightened wire hangers used for the beatings; of refusing to cry; of his mother pounding on the bedroom door, pleading for her husband to stop; of the time his father lay down on Ted's bed and made his son beat *him* with a razor strap.

But of all the stories he told me that day, the one that seemed to hold the deepest pain happened to him at age five—the critical age developmentally for a boy—when his father placed him in a boarding school and went off to the navy with his mother and younger sister.

"There wasn't even any grass in the playground," Ted said wistfully, "only pebbles. I was all alone. The only place I could go for comfort was the floor proctor. She was young and pretty, and she would hold me on her lap and rock me at night. Otherwise I would have died. I guess that's why I can't be alone. I have a real fear of abandonment. But I'm working on it. J.J. [the not-so-former mistress] has given me books on how to learn to be okay with solitude. She said she felt inundated by me. . . ."

"Ted," I exclaimed to him as we drove together that first day. "This was child abuse! It's so sad."



He seemed stunned that I had started crying. "No, you don't understand. My father really loved me. It was for my own good. It made me strong," he protested. "Come on, why don't we make love? Huh? How long's it been?"

"Six months," I replied, wondering if that entitled me to claim secondary virginity.

"Wait too long, it'll grow over," he said with just enough good humor to render it benign.

I drew a deep breath . . . I needed time before surfacing. Was I being arbitrary? Prudish? What's to be gained by refusing? Why not celebrate my return to pleasure by accepting Ted Turner's once-in-a-lifetime offer, a quick dip in the waters of bliss? After all, it was hard to refuse this wounded child-man so in need of care and nurturing.

"Okay," I said, finally breaking the surface.

"Hot dog!" He put foot to gas and back to the cabin we sped.

I would love to write a lyrical passage or two about what it was like. I described it later to friends as Versailles with all the spectacular lit-up fountains. Ted is a wonderful, thorough lover, and I was captivated (as well as relieved that everything still worked). After a nap—he's the napper; I just lay there, too much all-of-a-sudden feeling, too much to think about—he said he wanted to show me another ranch he was thinking of buying a few hours south of where we were. "It's a hundred twenty-five thousand acres. We can spend tonight there. It's closer to the airport. Whaddaya say?"

"Fine. Sure. Whatever." *Why would anyone want another, bigger ranch when they had this one?* I wondered as we drove out the long, bumpy road.

An hour later we entered the western edge of the new property that began at Madison River and stretched twenty-five miles to the east, where it ended at the Gallatin River. Two hundred square miles of utter beauty.

"Whaddya think? Should I buy this place? It's still in escrow."

"No," I replied. "Why would you want two big ranches? Wouldn't the Bar None be enough?"

He pondered this briefly, and I realized his had been a rhetorical question; he'd already made up his mind. "The fishing here is easier," he replied. "This is like elementary school, then I graduate to the Bar

None . . . high school. Besides, I want to bring it back to the way it was before the white man came here. Bison are the grazing animals that were here originally till we wiped them out in our attempt to deprive the Indians of their source of food and clothing." Fine. Great. Weird. Tom was also fascinated by bison . . . and how about Ted's interest in Indians!

Somewhere along in there, Ted pulled out a small calling card entitled "Ten Voluntary Initiatives."

"The problem with the Ten Commandments," he explained, "is that nowadays people don't like to be commanded, so I've rewritten them as voluntary initiatives."

"You rewrote the Ten Commandments?!" I asked, astonished.

"Yep. Moses had no way of knowing about the environmental crisis mankind is facing, the dangers of nuclear war, and overpopulation, so I've brought the Commandments up-to-date. Take a look. Pretty strong, huh?"

I glanced down the list: I promise to care for planet Earth and all living things thereon . . . to treat all persons everywhere with dignity, respect, and friendliness . . . to have no more than one or two children . . . to contribute to those less fortunate, to help them become self-sufficient . . . I reject the use of force, in particular military force, and I support United Nations arbitration of international disputes. . . . Pretty good list, I thought.

"What do you do with these cards?" I asked, the organizer part of me wondering if he really believed he could change anything with a list.

"I give them out to people. I read them when I make speeches. I made a lot of speeches last year to all kinds of groups. Sometimes it's for business, but I really like to speak on college campuses. Right now I'm trying to beat Bob Hope's record in doctoral degrees."

The Turner loquacity was unending. My innate shyness with people I didn't know well usually made me uncomfortable, feeling I wouldn't know how to fill in the silences. With Ted, this was no problem, for there were no silences. I wondered that his brain didn't just empty out.

"I think you're perfect for me," he said suddenly. "We care about the same issues, we're both overachievers, we're both in the entertainment business, and you need someone who is as successful as you—and I'm more successful than you, which is good. Those last two movies you did were real dogs—let's face it." I was dizzy with overstimulation and taken

aback at his lack of self-censorship. "In fact," he went on, "there's only one negative as far as I'm concerned . . . your age." Wow! And here I was under the impression I was looking pretty good. *Doesn't this guy keep anything to himself?*

"So, describe your former life to me," he asked suddenly. I began, feeling ever so pedestrian and boring next to him, by telling him about my family, my children, about the times I spent away on movie locations. "I wouldn't have put up with it," he interrupted. "I would have gone crazy if you had been in a love scene with another man and I'd have to watch it on the screen. I wouldn't have allowed you to go away for three months at a time. It must have been absolute hell for Tom." Long silence, then: "If this is going to work, you'll have to give up your career." *This guy is crazy! Doesn't he know anything about process?*

"Hey, you know that song 'Ballerina'? It's about a dancer who lost her one true love because she wouldn't give up her career?" And before I could respond, he began singing it:

*Once you said his love must wait its turn*

*You wanted fame instead.*

*I guess that's your concern,*

*We live and learn.*

*And love is gone, ballerina, gone*

*So on with your career, you can't afford a backward glance.*

*Dance on and on and on. . .*

*Ballerina, dance, dance.*

"That's not what you want, is it?" And then he abruptly went on, "I just realized . . . you're not going to give up your career . . . not until you have an Oscar."

"Ted," I said, "I've got two of them. One for *Klute* and one for *Coming Home*."

"Oh . . . really?"

*So there! It felt really good.*

We arrived at the almost-previous owner's house as the sun was going down in a poinsettia-red blaze with orange trim in a navy blue sky. Ted swirled around me like a dervish as I prepared dinner, singing romantic songs, reciting more of his boyhood poetry (always from bended knee, always in iambic pentameter, like my first boyfriend, Goey), telling me how hard it was—with all his many properties, the clothes he had to

keep straight in all the different locations, all the traveling—to do without a wife to help him out. "Get a maid," I replied, laughing at this rapscallion, whose words tumbled uncensored and unexamined from his mouth.

That night we shared a bed, and I told him more than I should have about my previous experiences in the sex department, even my childhood fantasies, subjects that for me had been traumatic but for him . . . well, they convinced him that I was what he was looking for. Anyone who'd had *those* fantasies and done *those* things, well. . .

The "bed" is different things to different people. To some it's a proving ground; to others a battleground; for still others a playground. For me, bed has been so fraught with theatrics over the years that I've found I need to know someone *prebed* for bed to be more than genital pleasure. For me, sex needed to be total anonymity or soulful connection.

I was in a deep sleep when I heard a voice: "Gore Vidal is writing something for Turner Films." It took me a moment to surface and realize it wasn't a dream, that it was morning and that he'd actually started the day with such an out-of-the-blue boast.

"Do you always start your day in sprint mode?" I asked groggily.

"I really like Gore Vidal," he said.

"Me too," I answered. "One time an owl fell in his soup at my house in Rome."

"What?" That got his attention.

"Never mind." It was too early and I was too sleepy to explain.

After breakfast Ted pulled a calendar out of his briefcase—or rather, it was a huge sheet of folded paper that when opened showed the entire year, month by month: so linear, so different from my own circular view of a year, that I found it hard to follow.

"Let's block out the times when we can get together this summer, okay? You got a calendar?"

"Not really, but it's okay." I quickly ran my mind down the left curve of my year—July, August, September . . . nothing. "I really don't have much planned."

Before there could be any more discussion, Ted had penciled me in for one or two weekends every month for the next four months, the follow-up coming just three weeks hence at his place in Big Sur. Yep. In addition to all the other properties, Ted apparently owned a place that jutted into the Pacific right above Pfeiffer Beach.

"Ted, this is kind of fast, don't you think? I mean, don't we need to get to know each other before we lock in all these dates?" I didn't know him. I didn't understand that he needed to know way in advance who was going to be with so he wouldn't be caught alone, God forbid, even on one night. Over his shoulder I could see up to September. Most of the days were already penciled in.

By the time we got to the Bozeman airport, I was a noodle, limp from overstimulation. If the super-stupendous performance (I swear, it felt like a 3-D stereophonic Shakespearean-level, sound-and-light show rolled over me) I had been privy to over the last thirty-some hours had been designed to knock my socks off, it had succeeded. My socks, my nerves, and my tongue were knocked. Over and out. On top of it all, I dropped me off at the airport two hours early, because he had to go to his private airport next door, where his jet was waiting to take him to Lania, where he was going to a fiftieth-anniversary celebration of *with the Wind* (he owned it)—with a girlfriend who'd rented a Scarlett O'Hara gown just for the occasion. He was, of course (could I have doubted it?), going as Rhett Butler. He didn't want to be late. Okay so I left it there. It felt bad. So much performing and then this. Off to the next one. I thought, Well, I had a lot of fun with this guy. He's totally amazing, and I definitely have a crush, but I must have bored him to death. I didn't say anything interesting.

When I got home, I talked with my therapist and did a lot of deep breathing. Something about Ted felt . . . dangerous, and I didn't want my heart broken again. I ended by writing him a letter thanking him over the weekend, telling him that he was a national treasure that deserved to be nurtured and preserved and that I'd had a lot of fun—but that I didn't feel good about the way he'd left me at the airport and I really wasn't sure all those dates we'd made were appropriate. The chemistry between Ted and me had been powerful, and I was fascinated by his power, everything-on-the-table forthrightness, but I think I was afraid of his vulnerability I'd be if I actually allowed myself to fall in love with him. Instead I fell into lust with a tall, dark, handsome Italian seventeen years younger than me, who made me feel like a girl again.

I called Ted to tell him I had fallen in love with someone and that I didn't be coming to Big Sur.

"Oh no!" I had to hold the receiver away from my ear. "I knew I would never have left you for this long. I was afraid this would happen. Damn it! Oh, come on . . . just for one weekend. You can't end it like this. It just started. You gotta give me another chance."

"No, I can't, Ted. I'm sorry, but I am in love with someone else."

"Well, I'm coming out there. You're going to have to tell me to my face I'll be there in three days. Make a reservation at that same place where we had dinner that first time."

Three days later, when the waiter asked Ted for his dinner order, he replied, "I'll just eat crow and some humble pie for dessert." I marveled at his humor and resiliency, given that he kept insisting this was an utter tragedy for him. But then he began reciting other tragedies, like the time when he was in his early twenties and had come home from school for a vacation to learn that his girlfriend Nancy, the love of his life, had fallen in love with someone else. He'd sat on a high-up hotel window ledge and contemplated suicide until he remembered his father's words: "Women are like buses. If you miss one, another'll always come along." That did it. He vowed never to let himself be that vulnerable again. (Shades of Ted . . . and Dad . . . and Tom. Hmm.)

I sat back and tried to decipher what was going on in the head of this unusual man. Was he convincing himself that I was, after all, just another bus? Was he really upset? I didn't quite get it yet—that with Ted that you see is what you get, no hidden agenda. All I had to do was listen carefully. It was all right there, like it or not. Full (though involuntary) disclosure.

I recall telling him that I was looking for intimacy with a man and that I thought I would find it with my Italian boyfriend. "This is what has made me so far. Before I die I want to know intimacy, and intimacy may be the one thing I don't think you're good at."

Three months later I went to visit my brother and his wife, Becky, and take a week of classes at the Orvis Fly Fishing School in Bozeman. I had booked the classes in early May, a month before I ever met Ted. In fact, I told Johnny Carson on his show in early spring that every important man in my life had been a fisherman—deep-sea, bass, everything fly-fishing. I told Johnny that I intended to learn fly-fishing so I'd be ready for the next one.